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REGULATING BODIES:

EVERYDAY CRIME AND POPULAR RESISTANCE

IN COMMUNIST HUNGARY, 1948-1956

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EVERYDAY CRIME AND POPULAR RESISTANCE

IN COMMUNIST HUNGARY, 1948-1956

by

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I personally had no knowledge of actual open resistance. The resistance I knew was a passive sort of resistance, and this was carried out by most people to perfection. The Party was completely powerless in this field.

—a Hungarian refugee interviewed in 1957

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On coming to power in 1948, the communist regime sought to transform Hungary into "a country of iron and steel." Industrialization and collectivization were made the order of the day; repressive police measures were necessary to force the project through. The effectiveness of this authoritarian regime has often been exaggerated by previous scholars. Drawing on archival documents, the "popular" press, and numerous contemporaneous interviews, I find instead that the communist administration was disorganized and ineffective, lending itself to manipulation by its subjects at all levels of the labor hierarchy from technocrats to factory workers to peasants. Its difficulties were further compounded by its clash with preexisting forms of social, economic, and cultural organization. In the countryside, peasants continued both traditional practices of resistance, such as wood theft, and cultural practices that were banned by the regime,

such as pig-killing. Both of these forms of resistance persisted throughout the period; ironically, the products of these deviant practices were commodified as they found their way onto the black market. The party-state likewise proved unable to eradicate theft from work, black-marketeering, and 'cosmopolitan' forms of cultural consumption such as listening and dancing to American jazz.

However, not all elements of society opposed the state at every turn; the limited successes the regime enjoyed were also due to these underlying forms of social organization. The patriarchal order that antedated communism carried through into the communist period, as is apparent in the regime's prostitution policy. Patriarchy's persistent influence was also a key factor in the nominal success of the regime's pronatalist policy in the early 1950s. Similarly, the regime's propaganda campaign against hooliganism resonated with a generational rift between the young generation coming of age under communism and its elders.

Overall, though, most elements of society nursed numerous grievances against the authoritarian system. Although there is no direct linkage between outright rebellion and pig-killing, black-marketeering, or most of the other forms of criminal behavior I describe herein, their cumulative effect was the erosion of whatever fragile legitimacy the regime enjoyed and the society-wide normalization of anti-regime activity. In October 1956, the *vox populi* finally got its opportunity to talk back.

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The epigraph is an excerpt from an interview archived at the Columbia University Hungary Refugee Project, Bakhmeteff Archive, Columbia Rare Books and Manuscript Library (Interview 100, Box 7, p. 59).

INTRODUCTION

Fifty years on, it might seem there is little left to say about the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Scholarly and popular analyses turned up at regular intervals throughout the Cold War.[1] Since 1989, the opening of the archives has enabled ever-more-accurate recapitulations of the events of October and November of 1956.[2] The main events of the revolution are well-documented: on 23 October 1956, student demonstrations rapidly snowballed into mass rebellion against the communist regime. Soviet troops intervened to restore order, and were beaten back by revolutionaries armed with little more than makeshift anti-tank weapons and desperate courage. After the Hungarian Army came over to the side of the revolution, the embattled Soviets were forced to withdraw from the capital. In November, the Red Army rolled back into Budapest. The revolution was crushed. Around 2500 Magyars were killed in the

[1] Significant pre-1989 works on 1956 include Paul Kecskemeti, *The Unexpected Revolution: Social Forces in the Hungarian Uprising* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), Tibor Méray, *Thirteen Days That Shook the Kremlin* (New York: Praeger, 1959), Miklós Molnár, *Budapest 1956: A History of the Hungarian Uprising* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971), János Radványi, *Hungary and the Superpowers: the 1956 Revolution and Realpolitik* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1972), and Paul Zinner, *Revolution in Hungary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962). All are competent summaries in light of the evidence available at the time. Useful firsthand accounts written for a popular audience include Noel Barber's *A Handful of Ashes: A Personal Testament of the Battle of Budapest* (London: Wingate, 1957) and Leslie Bain, *The Reluctant Satellites: An Eyewitness Report on East Europe and the Hungarian Revolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1960).

[2] The most recent English-language publications are László Eörsi, *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Myths and Realities* (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 2006), Charles Gati, *Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006), Joanna Granville, *The First Domino: International Decision Making during the Hungarian Crisis of 1956* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2004), and György Litván, editor, *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Reform, Revolt, and Repression, 1953-1963* (London: Longman, 1996). See also the valuable collection of documents edited by Csaba Békés, Macolm Byrne, and János M. Rainer, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002).

fighting. 193,000 more, or roughly 2% of the population, fled the country in November and December. Although the West and much of the rest of the world stridently condemned the Soviet invasion, there was no intervention: it was an election year in the USA, Britain and France were conducting their own imperialist action in the Suez, and in any case Hungary had long since been relegated to the Soviet sphere of authority.

Most scholars now concur on the basic goals and causes of the revolution. The revolutionaries sought to abolish communism, but they did not wish to do away entirely with socialism. Charles Gati has recently articulated this broad consensus: "Nagy and his cohort aspired to a third-road socialism reminiscent of the New Course, or the New Economic Policy of the 1920s in the USSR: a forerunner to the Prague Spring of 1968 and Mikhail S. Gorbachev's perestroika."[3] The genesis of revolutionary sentiment is similarly a matter of little debate, as most accounts assert that the intelligentsia were the primary engine of revolt. According to this conventional narrative, the writers and other intellectuals were deluded by the promise of building socialism until 1953, when Stalin's death ushered in a wave of reform and revelation in Hungary. As the depredations of the communist regime became widely known throughout society, the intelligentsia withdrew their support and sought instead to undermine the system. By 1956, the regime was weakened enough that another change in the Kremlin weather—in this case, Khrushchev's revelation of Stalin's crimes in his sensational speech to the twentieth party congress—tipped the scales in favor of revolt.

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[3] Gati, *Failed Illusions*, p. 55, Litván, editor, *the Hungarian Revolution of 1956*, p. 128. This consensus has replaced an earlier predisposition to view the revolution as a spontaneous explosion of "the Hungarian nation" against its alien Communist oppressor—see, eg., Ferenc Váli, *Rift and Revolt in Hungary: Nationalism Versus Communism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961).

The most glaring absence in the literature on 1956 is, simply put, the masses who actually made the revolution. The bulk of the scholarship on 1956 suffers from a sort of historiographical tunnel vision, as the writers' revolt and intellectual dissent—the point at which *articulate* resistance began, in mid-1953—is often taken for the beginning of the end of stalinist rule. For the most part, popular dissatisfaction with the regime is rightly assumed but inadequately explained: "the people" emerge from the wings as a sort of *deus ex machina*, recite their lines on stage, and then are as swiftly shooed out of the limelight once their work is done.[4] At the risk of stating the obvious: if there was no popular antipathy towards the regime, the intelligentsia would have found themselves hosting a revolution to which nobody showed up. This was profoundly not the case. Already on the evening of 23 October, the mass demonstration in Lajos Kossuth square before the Parliament building had swelled to 200,000 people, or roughly one in ten inhabitants of Budapest.[5] Similarly, the popular revolution lasted well after the actual shooting stopped, as the worker's councils formed in October continued to lead strikes and demonstrations into early 1957. In response, on 5 January 1957 the post-revolutionary regime imposed the death penalty for refusing to return to work; a week later, accelerated criminal proceedings were introduced for strike instigators.[6] This is not to suggest that the intelligentsia and the international context of the revolution were unimportant; they are necessarily a major part of the story. The interesting question, however, is not what finally galvanized the intelligentsia to action, but rather why their

[4] The one exception to this rule of thumb is Bill Lomax's *Hungary 1956* (London: Allison & Busby, 1976), with which I will deal at greater length in the Conclusion.
[5] Békés, editor, *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956*, p. xxxvii.
[6] Békés, editor, *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956*, p. xlviii.

scathing critique of the regime fell on such ready ears. What were the sources of popular dissatisfaction with the communist regime? What means of expressing and acting upon this dissatisfaction—of resistance, broadly defined—did ordinary Magyars have at their disposal?

In mid-1957, one of the Hungarian émigrés was asked about the relationship between the communist regime and society. He responded that

> One could succeed only in a proportionate degree with one's ability to make oneself useful to the system. And the latter mainly used the low capabilities of human beings. It taught everybody to lie, to spy, and slander. These activities were relatively easy to perform—one could make a capital of practically everything: if somebody lived well, then his wife or mother had hidden jewelry, if he frequented theatres, he was having a good time in a demonstrative sort of way, if he did not frequent theatres, then he was plugging his ears towards socialist culture, if he drank rum, he was an alcoholic, if he did not drink rum, he used other narcotics, if he went around with women, he was depraved, if he did not go around with women, he was homosexual, if he went around with one woman, he was still a homosexual but used her as an alibi. In other words, one could figure out one's fate mathematically.[7]

His cynical explanation clearly elucidates the animosity felt towards the communist regime by many of its subjects. It also reveals the commonly-held perception (both then and now) of the remarkable extent to which the state intruded upon the livelihoods and lives of its subjects, and its arbitrary punishment of even the slightest transgressions. To some extent, this impression is accurate. In pursuit of its goals of industrialization, collectivization, and social transformation, the Hungarian communist regime indeed ran roughshod over its subjects.

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[7] Columbia University Hungary Refugee Project, Bakhmeteff Archive, Columbia Rare Books and Manuscript Library (hereafter 'CUHRP'), Interview 100, Box 7, p. 59.

Crime and deviance were harshly punished in the interest of the common good (as defined by the state). In the period 1948 to 1956, 1.7 million Magyars were investigated for crime ranging from theft to prostitution to hooliganism; over 930,000 of these investigations resulted in convictions.[8] These are remarkable numbers for a country that numbered only 9.8 million in 1956; as early as 1953, "there can hardly have been a family in Hungary of which one or more members had not found itself in trouble with the police or state security organs."[9] To reduce these impersonal statistics to the level of individual cases, Communist Hungary was a state in which one could receive an eight-year prison sentence for illegally slaughtering pigs, a five-year sentence for embezzling funds amounting to less than half an unskilled worker's monthly salary, or a two-year sentence simply for making a caustic anti-regime remark while standing in a breadline.[10] No strike during this period lasted more than three hours. Other public disturbances and overt expressions of anti-regime sentiment were rare occurrences, and also swiftly crushed by the forces of law and order.[11] On the face of it, then, the communist regime seems to have successfully terrorized society into submission.

However, as we shift focus to the everyday lives of Magyars during this time, cracks appear in this authoritarian edifice. To take just two specific examples: one man,

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[8] *Statisztikai Évkönyv* [Statistical Yearbook] *1949-55, 1957*, *1960*, (Budapest: Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 1957, 1959, 1961), pp. 355-358, 343-346, and 357-363, respectively.

[9] Ignác Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, (Budapest: Corvina/Osiris 1999).

[10] Hungarian National Archive (Magyar Országos Leveltár, or MOL) M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) / 17 ő.e., p. 123, MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) / 5 ő.e., p. 134, and MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) / 8 ő.e. (2), p. 69a, respectively. All translations from Hungarian are my own unless otherwise noted.

[11] Mark Pittaway, "Control and Consent in Eastern Europe's Workers' States, 1945-1989: Some Reflections on Totalitarianism, Social Organization, and Social Control," in *Social Control in Europe, 1800-2000*, edited by Clive Emsley, Eric Johnson, and Pieter Spierenberg (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004), p. 346.

an émigré after the 1956 revolution, recounted how he had been labeled "politically unreliable" by the regime in 1949, but (after switching jobs six times in the next three years, and wiping his official record clean twice in the process) eventually landed a job in the Central Statistical Office handling classified data.[12] Another émigré had previously been caught trying to flee Hungary into Austria in 1955 just after his eighteenth birthday. He was sentenced to eight months in jail, but released after serving only four months; his criminal record did not preclude his landing a job with a military geological survey team shortly after his release. He attempted to flee Hungary again in September 1956, but was again captured; this time he was released after a three-day stay in jail without being charged. (His third try, after the 1956 revolution, was a success.)[13] These cases suggest a much less thoroughgoing repression: a much less total terror.

Indeed, as we peel back the oversimplified notion of a 'totalitarian' communist state, a strange fruit is revealed. In place of a monolithic and omniscient party-state, we find one that was consistently plagued by inadequate planning, interdepartmental confusion, and deliberate manipulation by its agents as well as its subjects. In place of an atomized and pliable populace we find one that regularly transgressed the boundaries of the permissible. More specifically, in contravention of rigorous production plans and imposed workplace discipline we find subtle office and shop floor machinations. In opposition to the state's drive to centralize and control all economic activity we find a thriving black market. In blatant defiance of the regime's attempt to regulate production and exchange in the countryside we find widespread practices of peasant resistance, such

[12] CUHRP, Interview 109, Box 7, pp. 26-27.
[13] CUHRP, Interview 404, Box 13, pp. 3-4, 9.

as wood theft and illegal pig-killing. In response to the party-state's attempt to control women's reproduction we find a complex network of underground abortion procurers and providers. Lastly, in reaction to communism's monochrome cultural offerings we discover an entire underworld of deviant leisure, of which hooliganism was only the most visible manifestation. A much more complex communism emerges from the investigation of everyday crime and popular resistance: one in which political control did not translate into social, cultural, or economic mastery, one in which a significant degree of personal autonomy and agency were possible, and one that—as it attempted to control every aspect of life, but did so in a heavy-handed, misdirected, and ultimately ineffective manner—was haunted at every turn by the specter of resistance.

Communism[14] in Hungary, as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, has been subjected to a protracted postmortem since its collapse in 1989. Although the autopsy is far from complete, our understanding of communist Hungary has benefited immensely from the assiduous work of many scholars, the (as-yet-incomplete) opening of the archives, and the deployment of new analytic paradigms, most notably those related to gender and cultural studies.[15] These are welcome developments. For much of the Cold War, many

[14] Of course, communism in the strict Marxist sense never came to fruition in Hungary, nor anywhere else for that matter. In the interest of semantic simplicity, I will use 'communist' to denote the specific aspects of the Soviet and Eastern European regimes, and 'socialist' to denote the broader aspects of Marxist theory. I also use 'stalinism' rather than 'Stalinism' deliberately, in order to stress its systemic aspects rather than the personal characteristics of the dictator himself.

[15] In just the last three years, publications in English include László Borhi, *Hungary in the Cold War 1945-1956: Between the United States and the Soviet Union*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), Martin Mevius, *Agents of Moscow: The Hungarian Communist Party and the Origins of Socialist Patriotism, 1941-1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), and a bumper crop of books on the 1956 Revolution—see footnote 2, above. On gender, see especially Lynne Haney, *Inventing the Needy: Gender and the Politics of Welfare in Hungary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), Éva Fodor, *Working Difference: Women's Working Lives in Hungary and Austria, 1945-1995* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) and Andrea Pető, *Women in Hungarian Politics 1945-1951* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2003). On culture, see Istvan Rév, *Retroactive Justice: A Prehistory of*

scholars conceptualized the communist regimes of the Soviet Union and its Eastern European progeny as 'totalitarian' systems.[16] According to this paradigm, as aptly summed up by Ivan Berend, the state "determines every aspect of life from the political, to the economic, to the cultural; from public to private, from the way of thinking to the way of expression, in an entirely state-owned and state-run society."[17] In short, the state was omniscient and omnipotent, and resistance futile: the history of communism thus boils down to little more than the intentions and machinations of ideologues and apparatchiks. The 'revisionist' stance emerged in Soviet historiography in the 1970s as a corrective to this oversimplified causal model. Revisionists, chief among them Sheila Fitzpatrick, held that we must look beyond the top-down explanation offered by totalitarianism to the broader social and cultural forces at work.[18] The problem with rewriting the history of communism from the ground up, however, was that social and cultural forces replaced ideology and politics as the primary causal agents. As Michael David-Fox notes, "Defining themselves in opposition to the monocausal reductionism of the previous generation, revisionists of the 1970s and 1980s invented a reductionist

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Postcommunism (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005) and Tibor Valuch, "A Cultural and Social History of Hungary, 1948-1990," in *A Cultural History of Hungary in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, edited by László Kósa (Budapest: Corvina, 2000). The literature in Hungarian is simply too voluminous to begin to recapitulate here; see the bibliography for those sources I rely on most.

[16] Although the term was first coined in the 1920s as a descriptor for Mussolini's regime, 'totalitarianism' as an analytic paradigm was first formulated by Hannah Arendt in her *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt & Brace, 1951); her argument was taken up and elaborated on by subsequent thinkers, most notably Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski in their *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965). For the Soviet Union, the oeuvres of Adam Ulam and Robert Conquest are most representative of the totalitarian stance: see, e.g, Ulam, *The New Face of Soviet Totalitarianism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), and Conquest, *The Great Terror* (New York: Macmillan, 1968). See also Abbot Gleason, *Totalitarianism : The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1995), on the evolution of this paradigm.

[17] Ivan Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe 1944-1993: Detour from the Periphery to the Periphery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 53.

'primacy' of their own, the interpretive stress on 'social forces' from below."[19] Even today, some scholars persist in going to these extremes. In this regard Eastern European historiography lags behind its Soviet cousin to some extent, as unqualified totalitarian arguments are still not uncommon. Historians are not invulnerable to popular sentiment, and in Eastern Europe the notion of complete Soviet dominance serves an additional exculpatory function for whatever complicity, or even 'collaboration'—the dirtiest word imaginable in the post-1989 context—was practiced by the party-states' subjects in their daily struggle to get by.[20]

However, much recent scholarship—in a "post-revisionist" vein, for lack of a better term—focuses instead on the "limits of dictatorship"[21] in communist states. This is a workable and productive approach: a flexible synthesis that avoids reifying either the state or society, and seeks instead to dissect the complex and subtle machinations of power, agency, and resistance in these authoritarian states. Many former revisionists now approach the field in this fashion; likewise, some former totalitarianists have discarded the more blatant failings of the classic, "thick" formulation in favor of a more nuanced,

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[18] See, e.g., Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[19] Michael David-Fox, "On the Primacy of Ideology: Soviet Revisionists and Holocaust Deniers (in Response to Martin Malia)," *Kritika*, Volume 5, Number 1 (Winter 2004), p. 83.

[20] Perhaps the best example of this "popular" totalitarianism is the House of Terror in Budapest, constructed in 2002. Therein, the vast differences between Nazism and Communism are elided in favor of a polemic multi-media narrative of the half-century-long oppression of the Hungarian people by outside agents. Ironically, the museum itself demonstrates a remarkably authoritarian visual aesthetic—especially the entry hall, which is a dead ringer for Mario Sironi's "Gallery of Fasci" in Mussolini's 1932 exhibition of the Fascist Revolution. Rév, *Retroactive Justice*, pp. 277-302. See also Mark Pittaway, "The 'House of Terror' and Hungary's Politics of Memory," *Austrian Studies Newsletter*, Vol.15, No.1, pp.16-17, Winter 2003. The museum's website is available at http://www.terrorhaza.hu/index2.html (viewed 1 December 2007).

[21] On the "limits of dictatorship," see Konrad Jarausch, editor, *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), and Mark Pittaway, "Control and Consent in Eastern Europe's Workers' States."

"thin" reading.[22] Thus, for the case of East Germany, Corey Ross has found that rather than a monolithic party-state, "unreliable local functionaries, petty corruption, informal 'arrangements,' and internal contradictions" were the norm; rather than quiescent subjects whipped into submission, their denizens were "ordinary people trying to utilize various regime policies to their own advantage, not so much resisting or complying (to use the conventional dichotomy) as extracting what they could from the circumstances."[23] Similarly-nuanced accounts of everyday life and popular resistance under communism have surfaced in the historiography of the other Eastern European states.[24] The same trend is apparent in the Hungarian case. We now know, for instance, that even during the most oppressive period of communist rule—from 1948 to 1953—a skilled working-class elite often managed to thwart the designs of the managers and planners, the Catholic Church continued to minister to its flock, and Hungarian women managed to retain some control over their reproduction despite the regime's abortion

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[22] Some of the better examples of post-revisionist Soviet scholarship include the more recent works of Sheila Fitzpatrick, such as *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village After Collectivization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), and Lynne Viola, editor, *Contending With Stalinism: Soviet Power and Popular Resistance in the 1930s* (Ithaca: Cornell University press, 2002). The best example of a more nuanced, "thin" totalitarianism—in which both the differences between the Nazi and Soviet systems, and the inefficiencies of the state system are acknowledged—is Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe*, especially pp. 53-55.

[23] Corey Ross, *Constructing Stalinism at the Grass-Roots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-1965* (London: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 2000), pp. 3-4.

[24] See, e.g., Melissa Bokovoy, *Peasants and Communists: Politics and Ideology in the Yugoslav Countryside, 1941-1953* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols Against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), and Mary Neuburger, *The Orient Within: Muslim Minorities and the Negotiation of Nationhood in Modern Bulgaria* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

ban.[25] In short, despite the regime's overarching attempt to control every aspect of life and labor, significant opportunities for autonomy, agency, and even resistance were possible.

Resistance is a problematic category of analysis. Motivations and intentions are often opaque; subjectivity and bias cloud both contemporaneous interpretations of events and their subsequent recapitulations by historians. In recent years, as Hollander and Einwohner note, a remarkably broad range of behaviors—ranging from strikes and demonstrations to hairstyles and sartorial choices—have been construed as resistance by various scholars.[26] Most are willing to accept that demonstrations, strikes, and the like constitute a form of resistance, as these acts openly articulate or at least demonstrate specific grievances against the governing structure. For the most part, the literature on resistance in communist Eastern Europe hews to this minimalist definition of resistance, focusing on the "flashpoints" of rebellion to communist rule (i.e. Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968, Solidarity in Poland in 1980-81).[27] These were indeed important episodes, and those in which anti-regime sentiment was most openly articulated—but they were also only the most obvious cases of resistance. Moreover, these defiant acts

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[25] On these points see Pittaway, "Az állami ellenõrzés társadalmi korlátainak újraértékelése: az ipari dolgozók és a szocialista diktatúra Magyarországon, 1948-1953," in *Munkástörténet – Munkásantropológia*, edited by Sándor Horváth, László Pethő, and Eszter Zsofía Tóth (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2003), Jason Wittenberg, *Crucibles of Political Loyalty: Church Institutions and Electoral Continuity in Hungary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), and Andrea Pető, "Women's Rights in Hungary: The Abortion Trials of 1952-53," *Hungarian Studies Review*, Vol. XXIX, Nos. 1-2 (2002).

[26] Jocelyn A. Hollander and Rachael L. Einwohner, "Conceptualizing Resistance," *Sociological Forum*, Volume 19, Number 4 (December 2004), pp. 534, 543.

[27] See, e.g., Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, editors, *Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe: Challenges to Communist Rule* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), and Grzegorz Ekiert, *The State against Society: Political Crises and their Aftermath in East Central Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

did not occur in a vacuum. They were rather the visible tip of a submerged mass of resentments and animosities. In order to fully recapitulate the varied forms of agency Eastern Europeans had at their disposal—and, incidentally, in order also to fully explain these flashpoint events—we must adopt a broader definition of resistance.

In contrast to the minimalist approach outlined above, many scholars have instead argued that resistance permeates the entire social field. Michel de Certeau argues that the apparent powerlessness of denizens of modern societies masks a broad range of tactics—"clever tricks of the 'weak' within the order of the 'strong,' an art of putting one over on the adversary on his own turf, hunter's tricks, maneuverable, polymorph mobilities, jubilant, poetic, and warlike discoveries"—and "these 'ways of operating' constitute the immeasurable practices by means of which users reappropriate the space organized by techniques of social reproduction."[28] Although this explanation rightly privileges individual agency, it fails to address the possibility of collective action; it also begs the question of what actually constitutes resistance. A more specific formulation is provided by James C. Scott, who argues that "the weapons of the weak"—non-confrontational and subtle acts such as theft, sabotage, dissimulation, and so forth—are regularly utilized by peasants, slaves, and other marginalized or subject populations. These covert practices have certain advantages in common: "They require little or no coordination or planning; they make use of implicit understandings and informal networks; they often represent a form of individual self-help; they typically avoid any direct, symbolic confrontation with

[28] Michel de Certeau (Steven Rendall, translator), *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 40, xiv.

authority."[29] Most importantly, for our purposes, these weapons of the weak are not mobilized solely for personal benefit or as coping mechanisms. In the absence of the opportunity to openly express grievances, they constitute a means of not only resistance but infrapolitics: political activity by means other than politics-as-usual.[30] A more inclusive definition of resistance opens up a much broader range of behavior for inquiry and interpretation. However, it also raises the danger of reading too much into the historical record: of seeing resistance where in fact there was none.

In any case, resistance is invariably contingent upon its immediate social and political context. Whatever its intent, the recognition of any given act as resistance depends on its transgression of an established law or social norm. In liberal-democratic regimes, both society and the state dictate what ought and what ought not be done. As long as a healthy civil society persists, it acts as a check on whatever authoritarian tendencies might arise in the government. In authoritarian regimes, the voice of "the people" is muted: the state is the key arbiter of what constitutes crime or deviance. In communist regimes, as Lynne Viola argues for the USSR, "The state … was a vital actor in the definition, discovery, or obfuscation of resistant behaviors; what it chose to label as resistance and in what context reveals much about official motivations and relations of domination."[31] The question then becomes: what did crime look like in this police state?

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[29] Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. xvi.
[30] Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 198-201.
[31] Lynne Viola, "Popular Resistance in the Stalinist 1930s: Soliloquy of a Devil's Advocate," in Viola, editor, *Contending With Stalinism*, p. 34.

In liberal-democratic regimes, crime and deviance are often conceptualized as the product of a consensual agreement among the members of that society: legal and normative codes that condemn those acts and behaviors that threaten the body social as a whole. This is a pleasant fiction.[32] According to Michel Foucault,

> certainly the 'crimes' and 'offences' on which judgement is passed are juridical objects defined by the code, but judgement is also passed on the passions, instincts, anomalies, infirmities, maladjustments, effects of environment or heredity; acts of aggression are punished, so also, through them, is aggressivity; rape, but at the same time perversions; murders, but also drives and desires…. it *is* these shadows lurking behind the case itself that are judged and punished."[33]

While these deeper passions are at some irreducible level inherent in the human condition, the point at which any given behavior becomes a menace to society is invariably a social, political, cultural, and legal construct. Although liberal-democratic legal systems do ensure a basic degree of personal sovereignty and protection for all their subjects, they also operate at the behest and in the best interests of governments, social and economic elites, and other powerful actors and interest groups. These vested interests play a key role in defining what constitutes criminal behavior. The label of 'deviant' is reserved for those who violate social norms—but these norms are likewise defined by economic, patriarchal, ethnic, and generational elites whose ideologies and interests do not represent any sort of society-wide consensus. The net result is that "crime and deviance are doubly socially constructed, as practical or behavioral responses

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[32] Colin Sumner, "Crime, Deviance, and Society," and Dario Melossi, "Theories of Social Control and the State between American and European Shores," in *The Blackwell Companion to Criminology*, edited by Sumner (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

to social conditions and as social censures reflecting the emotions, ideologies, and values of powerful social groups."[34] Criminal law and social constructions of deviance function as means of social control; the former reiterates and reinscribes the latter even as it disciplines the actual criminal.

The nature of this discipline has changed over time. In the early modern period, public torture and execution served to illustrate "the dissymmetry between the subject who has dared to violate the law and the all-powerful sovereign who displays his strength;" the gory display was not so much one of justice served as it was a stark representation of "the physical strength of the sovereign beating down upon the body of his adversary [the condemned] and mastering it."[35] It was also an ineffective means of social control. Execution days assumed a carnivalesque atmosphere—work stopped, bars and taverns were crowded, fights broke out—in which suppressed animosities and social tensions could explode into violence, and popular sentiment could even modulate into resentment against the sovereign.[36] In the transition to modernity, a whole new corpus of technologies of social control—more diffuse but also more pervasive, and certainly no less powerful—sprang up. Rather than being concentrated solely in the body of the condemned, power became instrumentalized via the organization and control of public and private spaces, panoptic surveillance, and the establishment of a 'carceral archipelago' of not only prisons and reform institutions but also barracks, factories, and

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[33] Michel Foucault (Alan Sheridan, translator), *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995), p. 17.
[34] Sumner, "Crime, Deviance, and Society," p. 9.
[35] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* pp. 49, 298.
[36] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 65. Le Roy Ladurie's *Carnival in Romans: Mayhem and Massacre in a French City* (New York: George Brasiller, 1979) remains the best case study of how a carnival atmosphere could touch the match to the buried powder keg of social tensions and antipathies.

schools. By means of these regulating bodies, the modern state perpetually seeks to regulate the bodies of its subjects: as discipline permeates the social field, outright punishment is only intermittently necessary. For modern liberal-democratic regimes, criminal codes are the most directly instrumental means of social control: the social construction of deviance, a necessary secondary component.

What, then, of crime and deviance in the party-states of Eastern Europe during the second half of the twentieth century? To date, most historians have interpreted crime statistics in communist Hungary and other repressive regimes as straightforward indices of political repression.[37] This is only partially accurate. The legal administration in communist Hungary clearly distinguished between political crimes such as weapons-hoarding and conspiracy on the one hand, and such common offenses as factory theft, "crimes against the public supply," and so on. The vast majority of offenses committed between 1948 and 1956 were for crimes of this latter type. However, this is not to state that these "common" crimes were entirely apolitical. Despite their relatively innocuous nature, as they were committed en masse, on a regular basis, and with no sign of decreasing, they came to pose an oblique threat to the regime's authority. In a state that seeks to control every aspect of life, every transgression becomes a potential threat to its pretension to totalitarian control. However, the communist regime in Hungary sought not only to dominate the entire social field but also to transform it in accordance with its Marxist variant of high-modernist ideology.

[37] See, e.g., Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century,* p. 273, Gati, *Failed Illusions*, p. 49.

The profound and intrusive effects of communism in these "closed" states often mask the continuities between them and their "open" counterparts in the West. Albeit divided by the Iron Curtain, societies both East and West shared a key point in common: both were subject to intrusive intervention by the state in the name of modernity. As Scott argues, modernist projects have two elements in common everywhere they occur: the imposition of 'legibility' and an interventionist, high-modernist ideology. Legibility consists of the administrative ordering of populations and social space: "The utopian, immanent, and continually-frustrated goal of the modern state is to reduce the chaotic, disorderly, constantly-changing social reality beneath it to something more closely resembling the administrative grid of its observations."[38] This deracinative process is supplemented by a high-modernist ideology, "best conceived as a strong, one might even say muscle-bound, version of the self-confidence about scientific and technical progress, the expansion of production, the growing satisfaction of human needs, and, above all, the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws."[39] These two elements are common to schemes to transform the human condition in both communist and liberal-democratic systems. To take but two examples, parallels between the two are apparent in convergent practices of internal surveillance in the early

[38] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Reform the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 82. Foucault concurs: "The first of the great operations of discipline is … the constitution of '*tableaux vivants*,' which transform the confused, useless, or dangerous multitudes into ordered multiplicities." *Discipline and Punish*, p. 148.
[39] Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, p. 4.

twentieth century, and convergent responses to domestic dissent in the 1960s.[40] This potent high-modernist scheme can result in much good, in the form of public-works projects, welfare and insurance provision, and so forth; however, when coupled with an authoritarian regime and a prostrate civil society, the results are catastrophic. To take just one example, the roughly-contemporaneous construction of the Hoover Dam in the USA and the White Sea Canal in the USSR in the 1930s were both massive public-works projects that dramatically transformed the physical landscape; however, the hardships incurred in the former case pale in comparison to the daily injuries and fatalities that characterized the latter.[41] In both systems, however, a certain degree of conflict inevitably occurs in the course of the high-modernist project. Forced off the land, rural populations find themselves living in cities, working in factories, and enmeshed in monetary economies. While some segments of society benefit from the realignment of societal norms, expectations, and opportunities that occurs in this transformation, others stagnate, are supplanted, or find their prior status threatened. Societal tensions are created and exacerbated in this process. This is the broader context of the imposition of communist rule in Hungary.

Hungary was ripe for change after the war. This Central European state had lagged behind its western cousins during the interwar period: exploitative noble *latifundia* dominated its agricultural production, industrialization was halting and incomplete, a small and conservative elite held sway over politics. Interwar efforts at land

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40 Peter Holquist, "'Information is the Alpha and Omega of our Work': Bolshevik Surveillance in its Pan-European Context," in *The Journal of Modern History*, Volume 69, Number 3 (September 1997), and Jeremi Suri, *The Power of Protest* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

reform, developing industrial production, and expanding the franchise were halfhearted and inadequate.[42] After the war, many Magyars were cognizant of the necessity of restructuring their nation along more egalitarian and modern lines. Hungary also had to be rebuilt in a very literal sense, as the retreating German and advancing Russian armies had made Budapest and many other regions of Hungary into wastelands. This was fertile soil for social experimentation: a welfare state on the contemporaneous western European model, or even a more humanitarian and less exploitative socialism (or, for that matter, anything resembling the promise rather than the reality of communism), could have enjoyed mass support and legitimacy had it delivered on even a modicum of its promises. This was not to be the case. Modernity entered Hungary clad in the wolf's clothing of communism.

After consolidating one-party rule in 1948, the new regime embarked on an ambitious program of industrialization and collectivization. Forced off their land, peasants entered Budapest and other urban centers in search of work; new industrial centers such as Sztálinváros (Stalintown) sprang up practically overnight. Women and youths also swelled the ranks of the urban proletariat. The criminal code was rewritten to include crimes against the socialist economy and the public supply; the State Security Authority (Államvédelmi Hatóság, or ÁVH) and a network of party activists, "people's educators" (*népnevelők*), and informers ferreted out wrongdoers and oversaw this

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[41] Moreover, the White Sea Canal never quite worked as planned. Oleg Khlevniuk (Vadim Staklo, translator), *The History of the Gulag* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 334-335.

[42] Ivan T. Berend, *Decades of Crisis: Central and Eastern Europe before World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 19-20, 82, 124-129, 138-144. On interwar Hungarian politics, see C.A. Macartney, *October Fifteenth: A History of Modern Hungary, 1929-1945* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1961).

intrusive regimentation of work, reproduction, and leisure time. The result was the criminalization of a broad range of behavior that had previously been ignored by the police and courts, even as the lives and activities of these newly-communist subjects were more closely monitored. The crime wave that swept Hungary in the 1950s was thus only partially due to the underlying social and economic tensions of modernization; it was also the result of new laws and heightened surveillance.

The regime's heavy-handed and oppressive strategies ensured that the popular resentment and blame for the hardships incurred in this modernizing process fell squarely at its doorstep. Martin Mevius has recently made a strong case that communist rule in Hungary was perceived as an unwelcome and foreign imposition, driven home by a cohort of "agents of Moscow," and resented by a majority of the population.[43] My research suggests that this conclusion is accurate. By criminalizing such a broad range of activity and behavior, the party-state essentially set itself in opposition to a wide segment of society. It would be a mistake, however, to reduce this to a direct state-versus-society dichotomy as some scholars have in the past.[44] The state, per se, is an abstraction; its omnipresence in communist societies masks the broad diversity of the differing (and often contradictory) goals of its component organizations and the interdepartmental confusion, tension, and competition that ensued. Moreover, its agents were not automatons; their personal interests and social bonds affected their execution of their

[43] Mevius, *Agents of Moscow*, especially pp. 267-268. The actual degree of support for communism in these states is a hotly-debated matter. For the period in question it is likely that states such as Bulgaria and Romania, where the standard of living actually increased during the first years of communist rule, probably did not exhibit the same degree of animosity towards communism as did Poland or Hungary, where widespread poverty followed in the wake of the devastation wrought by the Red Army. I discuss the issue of popular support for the Hungarian communist regime at greater length in Chapter 1.
[44] See especially Ekiert, *The State Against Society*.

orders. Societies are likewise diverse and hierarchical bodies in which factions delineated by gender, class, or ethnicity are consistently warring for advantage. These social identities are transient and dependent on context: members of the Party might frown on taking bribes but deal on the black market for the goods they need, working-class youths might be good workers during the day and hooligans by night. Thus deviants or resistors against one aspect of the communist project could find themselves supporters of others, and, where the regime's goals jibed with underlying societal and cultural predispositions (as, for instance, with the criminalization of abortion—see Chapter 3), it did meet with some success. For the most part, though, the communist administration's heavy-handed brutality and intransigence drove most Hungarians—including Party members and administration workers—into what were essentially lives of everyday crime; its relative inability to regulate its subject bodies enabled, exacerbated, and even encouraged these behaviors. As a result, Communist control in Hungary was never fully consolidated, even in the late 1940s and early 1950s; from 1953 until the revolution in 1956, it was on thin ice indeed.

A note on sources: as one might expect, revolutions are not kind to archives. As one refugee recalled, "During the revolution many cadre files got into the hands of the respective people…. I saw when cadre files were taken out to the street, poured down by gasoline and burned."[45] Attempts at destroying damning evidence were probably carried out by party officials, as the revolution got underway in October, and definitely by the revolutionaries until it collapsed in November. These archives have not suffered only the

[45] The cadre, or *kader* file, was the individualized record of one's job, residence, criminal record, and any other distinguishing features. CUHRP, Interview 115, Box 8, p. 35.

usual ravages of time and careless historians; they have been purged with deliberate intent by both state officials and revolutionaries. As a result, the official record is marred by gaps and inconsistencies; we are often forced to extrapolate what was from what remains.[46] The bulk of my archival evidence is drawn from the relatively-intact records of the administrative branches of the Communist Party[47] and the Party- and Mass-Organization Department, the organization in charge of monitoring relations between the Party and the rest of society.[48] These archives are especially useful to the historian, as they include not only the internal documents of these regulating bodies but also their voluminous correspondence with various other organizations at all levels, from the central administrative offices down to district- and even county-level organizations. The Budapest Municipal Archive yielded many useful documents concerning the operations of the capital city's police force and legal administration.[49] In order to flesh out this administrative transcript with its public representation, I turned to the communist media. I relied primarily on four weekly or bi-weekly publications. *Esti Budapest* (*Budapest at Night*) was the evening newspaper, which emphasized leisure and culture more than its daytime counterparts; *Szinház és Mozi* (*Theatre and Film*) was the trade publication for

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[46] To take just one example, the weekly report on illegal pig-killing I rely on in Chapter 2 (MOL M-KS-276. 96 (Iü) / 8 ő.e., p. 156-211), was obviously one of a series, as evinced by fragmentary portions of two other weekly reports from the same period.

[47] These records are housed in the Hungarian National Archive (Magyar Országos Leveltár, or MOL) in fonds M-KS-276. f. 96, passim. They are further subdivided into ministerial branches; I rely most heavily on the Legal Affairs (Igazságügy, abbreviated Iü) and Military (Fegyveres, or F) subdivisions, and also on the Health Affairs (Egeszségügy, or Eü) archives in Chapter 3.

[48] This mouthful is no more palatable in Hungarian: *Part- és-Tömegszervezet Osztály*. Its records are housed in MOL M-KS 276. f. 88, passim.

[49] Budapest Fővárosi Leveltárá (BFL). I also conducted research at the State Security Historical Archive (Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára, or ÁBTL) and the Institute for the History of the 1956 Revolution (1956-os Magyar Forradalom Történetének Dokumentációs és Kutatóintézete), as well as the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library (DEPL). A note to researchers: many of the documents in ÁBTL were formerly archived in the Történeti Hivatal, or Historical Office.

theater and film. These two periodicals and *Nők Lapja* (*Women's Journal*) were directed at the general public. *Magyar Rendőr* (*Hungarian Policeman*) was directed at policemen, prosecutors, and other figures in the legal administration. The first three reveal how the communist regime sought to market itself in the cultural sphere; the lattermost reveals the semipublic operations of the police system at work on an everyday basis. Taken together, these administrative and public transcripts reveal both the intentions of the administration and the manner in which it portrayed them to the public.

The "hidden transcript"—"the critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant," or the record of how Magyars sought to elude or evade the regulating bodies tasked with their control—poses a more difficult question.[50] The hidden transcript does creep through in the official sources, in the form of trial records, police reports, and so forth; however, it is filtered through the prism of official ideology and administrative bias. Thus, in order to uncover the hidden transcript of everyday life in communist Hungary, I also drew on numerous personal accounts of life under communism. They are at once my most interesting and most problematic sources. They fall into two groups: a set of interviews conducted with Hungarians (most of them escapees) by Radio Free Europe during the period 1951-1956, and another set of interviews conducted with 1956 émigrés by a Columbia University research team during the summer of 1957.[51] The Radio Free Europe interviews, or "Items," housed at the Open Society Archives at

[50] As Scott notes, government and ruling elites also generate a 'hidden transcript' of sorts, i.e. top-secret documents and other behind-the-scenes machinations (*Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. xii). Herein I will refer to this confidential record as the 'administrative transcript' to avoid confusion with the hidden transcript proper.

Central European University in Budapest, pose a number of interpretive challenges. They are in essence the stories told by those most fed up with the communist regime to those most willing to hear the worst about it. They reflect the demographic distribution of refugees: most are young males from Budapest and the regions of Hungary closest to the Austrian border. The interviewers did not consistently identify themselves as Radio Free Europe employees. Worst of all, we know for a fact that at least some of these interviews were simply made up from scratch.[52] These are serious but not terminal faults: the Items' biases (on the part of both interviewer and interviewee) are readily apparent in most instances. The Items' contents were crosschecked with information derived from other sources, and editorial oversight seems to have been thorough.[53] As a rule of thumb, I use only those Items that include biographical data on the informant. I also indicate where the Items significantly diverge from what the rest of the historiographical record suggests. The Columbia interviews are quite different: they were collected in a rigorous manner, with due attention paid to ensuring a representative sample of age, occupation, and gender. Their one major failing is that they are colored by the immediately-past experience of rebellion and flight. Despite that, in conjunction with the Items, they allow the reconstruction of the hidden transcript of everyday resistance under communism. I quote both of these sources at some length, as they

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[51] Open Society Archives, Central European University, HU-300-4-2, Master Evaluation Items (hereafter OSA/RFE Items), and Columbia University Hungary Refugee Project, Bakhmeteff Archive, Columbia Rare Books and Manuscript Library (CUHRP), respectively. The finding aid for the OSA/RFE Items is now available online at http://www.osa.ceu.hu/db/fa/300-1-2.htm (viewed 1 December 2007).

[52] Rév, *Retroactive Justice*, pp. 265-266.

[53] Pittaway, "The Education of Dissent: The Reception of the Voice of Free Hungary, 1951-1956," *Cold War History*, Volume IV, Number 1 (October 2003), pp. 110-111. Each Item was prefaced by an editorial summary which indicated the reliability of the source and drew connections to other Items as well as other sources of information that contradicted or supported the data therein.

provide an unique opportunity to hear the voices of individuals whose experiences are often left out of the historical record. Also, for the informants in both these sets of interviews, and indeed for all the individuals I discuss herein, I use only their initials—or, in the cases where I discuss an individual at length, the first name and initial. I do so because some of these informants, and certainly their families, are still alive; as one can imagine, they might not choose to enter the historiographical record in this manner. It is neither my responsibility nor my right to "out" them.

The following analysis is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 presents a lengthy theoretical and statistical overview of communism, crime, and resistance in Hungary between 1948 and 1956. The effect of stalinization in Hungary was to compress the effects of the high-modernist project—and all its corollary discontents—into a much-abbreviated timespan. Three distinct periods are apparent: the peak of stalinist rule from 1948 to mid-1953 was followed by Imre Nagy's reformist New Course, which lasted until early 1955. Afterwards, the brief recrudescence of stalinism after Nagy's ouster lasted in weakened form until October 1956. The New Course, generally written off as a halfhearted and ineffective effort at reform, emerges here as a key element in the weakening of the regime and the escalation of societal tension that culminated in 1956: a delayed-action Pandora's box that, once opened, proved impossible to shut. Both before and after 1953, however, the communist administration was far from monolithic or omniscient; rather, it was imposed in haphazard and ad hoc fashion, rendering it vulnerable to manipulation at a number of levels. In the interstices of the system, the regime's own workers adopted practices that subverted its goals. It was likewise confounded on the margins, where it butted up against preexisting forms of social and

economic organization. Finally, the physical borders of the system, most notably the border with Austria, were not impermeable. In each case, resistance accumulated: not in the sense of the coalescence of an united front against regime imperatives, but rather in the sense of poorly-conductive matter inhibiting an electrical charge.

Peasant resistance is the topic of Chapter 2. In the countryside, the ÁVH, police, and legal apparatus were conspicuous in their absence; here the interstitial machinations described in Chapter 1 were most apparent. Undermanned and beleaguered, local authorities often eschewed oppression in favor of compromise and collaboration with their unruly subjects. The countryside was also the site of the greatest clash between the state's centralizing imperative and traditional modes of behavior. The Magyar peasantry's perennial desire to own and farm their own land had finally been realized in the postwar land reform; thereafter, they wanted little more than to be left alone by the state. This was not to be the case. Collectivization was carried out on the Soviet model, but with distinctly less verve; significant opportunities for evasion and resistance presented themselves at every turn. I discuss two specific practices: wood theft and illegal pig-killing (*feketevágás*). The former was a perennial form of peasant resistance; it continued largely unabated, and may have even become more widespread, under communism. Pig-killing, on the other hand, was not only legal before 1948; it was a major locus of peasant identity. Peasants continued to slaughter their own pigs despite the regime's sanction; some of them, like János S., were able to make a killing on the black market as a result. In both cases—the one a traditional form of rural crime, the latter a newly-criminalized traditional element of rural life—the regime's attempts to

control these criminal behaviors were not only ineffective; they exacerbated them, and drove the Magyar peasantry headlong into not only resistance but hypercapitalism.

Chapter 3 deals with the gendered aspects of crime and deviance in communist Hungary. The regime's mobilization of women in its industrializing drive had two key effects. First, the birth rate fell, as women curtailed their reproduction under the triple burden of work, housework, and political involvement. Second, working and politically-active women were perceived as a threat by patriarchal elements of society. The persistence of partriarchy[54] under communism explains both the regime's failure to control prostitution and its nominal success in controlling women's reproduction. Prostitution, regulated before World War II, was now criminalized by the party-state; as the brothels were closed, the regulation of women's sexuality shifted to their workplaces and homes. Prostitution persisted nonetheless, swiftly resuming the same role it had under the interwar regime. On the other hand, the regime's pronatalist campaign met with some success. This patriarchal scheme was only partially successful, as an underground network of abortion providers and procurers continued to function throughout the period. During the New Course, the birthrate did indeed rise, briefly—with catastrophic effects in the strained and unprepared health care system. However, this "success" in raw demographic terms was only possible because the regime's drive to control reproduction jibed with underlying patriarchal norms. In both cases, regime

[54] I use this term to denote the processes by which masculine privilege consistently and often implicitly reasserts it authority over female-gendered members of society. As Éva Fodor notes, this basic process is common to most modern societies, but we must distinguish between the "*processes* through which such domination comes about and the *degree* to which patriarchal domination is realized." Éva Fodor, *Working Difference*, p. 21 (see also pp. 21-27).

policies were profoundly influenced by underlying and historic societal formations. Resistance, where it occurred—most notably in the form of women who chose abortion as a means to control their reproduction, and the doctors and other medical personnel who chose to assist them—occurred in opposition to both regime policy and the underlying substrate of patriarchy.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the question of socialist culture, deviant leisure, and hooliganism. For the most part, the siren song of new and ideologically-sound cultural offerings fell on deaf ears. Hungarians sought refuge in their traditional Catholicism, which served as a locus of anti-regime identity and activity. They also continued their long tradition of involvement in the broader European and American cultural spheres: reading western literature, following western fashion, and above all continuing to listen and dance to jazz just as they had throughout the interwar period. This underground jazz scene persisted throughout the period despite recurrent attempts to eradicate it. The bars and beer-gardens of Budapest also generated a more concrete manifestation of anti-regime behavior, but also generational rebellion, in the form of the hooligan, or *jampec*. These unruly youths in flashy clothing eschewed the tame pleasures offered by the state in favor of dancing to American jazz. They also roamed the streets in packs, and fought with each other and policemen. Here, also, the regime was able to capitalize on underlying social tensions—generational, in this case—to generate some support for its anti-hooligan campaign.

Four key themes recur throughout my narrative of everyday crime and popular resistance in communist Hungary. First, the past weighed heavily on the present in communist Hungary. While many scholars conceptualize communism as an abrupt break

with the past, I find significant continuities with the interwar period and even earlier periods. Second, despite its apparent monolithic status, the party-state had great difficulty extending its authority beyond the immediate sphere of political control. The unexpected consequences of the regime's actions detracted from, and at times even militated directly against, its intentions. Third, as a result, the system did not only permit resistance; it engendered and enabled it. Resistance emerged not only as a result of the clash of statist authority with stubbornly-persistent social, economic, and cultural practices; in many cases, it surfaced as a result of weaknesses inherent in the system. Finally, in those cases where state policies were successful, this was often due to a symbiosis between regime policy and these underlying tendencies.

In the Conclusion, I address the broader implications of my analysis of crime in communist Hungary for the study of communism, resistance, and crime in the other countries of Eastern Europe in the second half of the twentieth century. Many elements of the Hungarian experience in the 1950s were replicated elsewhere throughout Eastern Europe. In the final analysis, however, what sets Hungary apart is the conflagration of 1956. On the face of it, there is no direct link between the behaviors and acts I describe herein and the revolution proper: dealing on the black market, dancing to American jazz, or getting an abortion are, in terms of resistance, a far cry from throwing Molotov cocktails at Russian tanks. However, taken together these quotidian acts eroded the regime's control over society and whatever legitimacy it enjoyed. Anti-regime behavior became a commonplace, everyday occurrence, thereby lowering the bar for outright rebellion when circumstances made this possible. After 1953, these everyday crimes resonated with the gradual articulation of an oppositional politics by the intelligentsia.

By the autumn of 1956, popular and elite dissatisfaction with the regime were in synchrony and had reached fever pitch. The revolution was partially due to the mobilization of the intelligentsia and the shifting international context, as most scholars concur—but it was also one of "those rare moments of political electricity when, often for the first time in memory, the hidden transcript is spoken directly and publicly in the teeth of power."[55]

[55] Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. xiii.

CHAPTER 1: STALINIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

In October 1951, Sándor H.'s luck finally ran out.[56] Between March and June of that year he had run an elementary confidence scheme in Budapest and its environs: he had applied for work at three different places, gotten whatever advance money or equipment he could, and then disappeared as soon as possible. All told, this swindle netted him a paltry sum: some mining equipment he sold for 110 forints, and 240 forints in cash advances. The unmarried 26-year old was arrested in Pest, tried in public before 600 of his peers, and sentenced to five years in prison for embezzlement. Justice—or what passed for it in the communist legal system—had been served. At this basic level, Sándor H.'s experience at the hands of these authoritarian authorities is a case study in the swift, efficient, and merciless functioning of the communist police and legal adminsitration.

The story is more complex. Sándor H. had been in and out of jail since the mid-1940s: he had been arrested in 1946 for embezzling, in 1947 for speculation, in 1948 for theft, and, on four separate occasions between 1947 and 1949, for vagrancy as well. He was obviously the sort of recidivist petty criminal that was probably destined for trouble with the law in most any state; however, the particulars of his experience in communist Hungary are instructive. Sándor H. had been repeatedly re-released into public life (probably due to prison overcrowding). Although he was eventually caught (and the circumstances of his arrest are unclear; it was most likely a random identity check or denunciation rather than a manhunt that finally brought him down), he had been able to

[56] The following account is based on his trial record in MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) / 5 ő.e., p. 134.

stay off the regime's radar for the two years between his last incarceration and his most recent spate of crimes, and for a few months following. Moreover, he had not been required to provide his workbook—the official record of his job history, and supposedly a mandatory prerequisite for employment—at *any* of the job sites he applied for. Pleading its loss, he had simply been given a new one on each occasion. In short, the mere fact that Sándor H. was on the street, much less able to hoodwink his potential employers so easily, raises the possibility that the regime's ability to control its workforce or monitor its deviants was severely limited. We must also note the relative insignificance of his crimes; his transgressions probably cost the state less, in terms of lost funds and labor, than it did to process him through the legal system. Most importantly, as I will argue in this chapter, it seems likely Sándor H. was simply less adept at manipulating the system than many, perhaps most, of his contemporaries: as the one that didn't get away, he may well have been the exception rather than the rule.

On attaining power in 1948, the communist administration in Hungary embarked on an ambitious, high-modernist program to transform Hungary into "a country of iron and steel." The Soviet model of collectivized agriculture and mass industrialization was transplanted to Hungary wholesale even as the country rebuilt after the devastation caused by the Second World War. The societal and economic tensions inherent to modernization, which other European societies had weathered over the course of generations, were compressed into less than a decade. Stalinization was an unpopular scheme: whatever goodwill the communists had accumulated during the immediate postwar period and as a result of its few popular measures was wasted as the regime failed to deliver on its promises, living standards fell, and individual rights and freedoms

were severely curtailed. The criminal code was rewritten along Soviet lines, ensuring especially harsh penalties for "class enemies," political offenses, and crimes against the socialist economy.

Oppression and resistance were not consistent throughout this period. Three distinct periods are apparent: a phase of high stalinism from 1948 to early 1953, a brief period of reform communism from June 1953 to April 1955, and a brief resurgence of the hardline regime from then until the revolution in October 1956. During this first period, the Hungarian Communist party (*Magyar Dolgozók Pártja*, or MDP) under the rule of Mátyás Rákosi (1892-1971) attempted to transform the Hungarian state to conform to the Soviet model established in the 1930s. As a result, crime rates—in this case a reliable bellwether of both oppression and resistance—climb steadily throughout the period, peaking in early 1953. Some evidence suggests that the degree of oppression in Hungary may well have been worse than anywhere else in Eastern Europe at the time. Destalinization set in almost immediately after Stalin's death in March 1953; at the Kremlin's bidding, Rákosi was replaced by Imre Nagy (1896-1958), who ushered in a short-lived attempt to reform the system. Most scholars now concur that the New Course was largely ineffective; its tentative attempts at change were halfhearted, and they were readily thwarted by Rákosi and his fellow hardliners. Although this is an accurate assessment of its results as judged by its intentions, its unintended consequences were much more significant. A general amnesty resulted in the release of many Magyars from prisons and internment camps; the legal apparatus also scaled back the scope of its operations and dismissed a number of cases outright. When Rákosi and the other hardliners came back into power in 1955, they were unable to reimpose the same degree

of control they had enjoyed prior to 1953; revolutionary sentiment swiftly mounted, culminating in the events of 23 October 1956. Right up until the summer of 1956, open dissent remained a foolhardy and ineffective proposition; opportunities for covert activity, however, were legion.

Resistance to the regime's diktat surfaced in the interstices and on the margins and borders of the system. The communist administration was a nightmare of unrealistic, perpetually-changing plans and a bloated bureaucracy; workers at all levels of the labor hierarchy worked around and undermined the communist program, for motives ranging from self-protection to profit. These systemic, interstitial infrapolitics were complemented by resistance on the margins—that is, in those fields where the widening circumference of the party-state's authority directly intruded on established spheres of social, cultural, and economic organization. The party-state's attempt to control factory production led to widespread theft even as its attempts to regulate the economy generated a thriving black market. Lastly, despite the construction of watchtowers, barbed-wire fences, and minefields on the Austrian border, the Iron Curtain was far from impermeable. Cross-border transfers of people, goods, and information made it impossible for the communist regime to entirely close off Hungary from the West.

Communism and Crime

Communism in Hungary was based on the system that evolved in the USSR in the course of the late 1920s and 1930s. Its consequences were similarly severe and far-

reaching. The Soviet variant on modernization was similar to "civilization offensives"[57] elsewhere in the industrializing world: legibility was made the order of the day, and the high-modernist vision provided the direction and impetus of this scheme to transform the Russian condition. The collectivization of individual farms into state enterprises was complemented by a massive expansion of industry; millions of peasants became workers, leaving their farms for urban lives and factory jobs in the epicenters of industrial production. This project was at least partially successful: the Soviet Union made great progress towards overcoming a century of economic backwardness within a generation. It was, however, carried out with grievous disregard for the negative effects of social engineering and the human costs incurred in the process. Millions died during collectivization, and hundreds of thousands more perished during the terror that followed. The creation of a police state was necessary to ramrod the unpopular project through. Surveillance and terror kept the Soviet populace in line, and labor camps and prisons were a ubiquitous feature of the closely-watched socialist landscape.[58] The end result of the high-modernist scheme in the USSR was mixed: a profound success in creating a controlled, centralized, and legible state, and an equally profound failure to make it work as planned.[59] This dystopic formula was transplanted to Eastern Europe after World War II, with similarly equivocal results.

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[57] As defined by Peter Spierenberg, a "civilization offensive" consists of "the more or less conscious efforts by powerful groups to change the norms and conduct of others in the direction of the former's standards of civilized behavior." Spierenberg, "Social Control and History: An Introduction," in *Social Control in Europe*, edited by Clive Emsley, Eric Johnson, and Spierenberg (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004), p. 15.

[58] On these points see especially Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, Viola, *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin*, and J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

[59] Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, p. 217.

Communism was foreign to Hungary; modernity was not. Hungary had lagged behind its western European cousins throughout the nineteenth century, but by the fin-de-siècle was firmly on the road to industrialization and urbanization. Modernity entered Central Europe largely via the transmission of ideas, technologies, and capital from the European core. A certain "politics of backwardness" ensued as these Central European states constantly sought to catch up to the English, American, and German industrial juggernauts. Hungary did manage to beat this rigged game to some extent. By the turn of the twentieth century, unlike many of its Central European counterparts the Hungarian railroad industry was self-sufficient; the density of its railroad network ranked sixth in Europe. By 1913, Budapest was the eighth largest city in Europe. In addition to numerous metalworking, shipbuilding, and manufacturing enterprises, it boasted the largest flour milling industry in the world after the USA.[60] This promising start was derailed during the interwar period. After Béla Kun's abortive communist revolution of 1919, a conservative political regime led by Miklós Horthy (1868-1957) bought security and stability at the price of economic and political stagnation. World War II leveled this elitist, conservative system, but its impact—and that of the subsequent brief period of nominal democracy and coalition rule from 1945 to 1948—established important precedents for the later stalinization of Hungary.

The effects of World War II were severe. Inspired by irredentist territorial ambitions, economic realities (as with most other Central European nations, Germany

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60 Ivan Berend, *Decades of Crisis: Central and Eastern Europe before World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 19-20, and Károly Vörös, "Birth of Budapest: Building a Metropolis, 1873-1918," in *Budapest: A History from its Beginnings to 1998* (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 1997), p. 104.

was Hungary's primary trade partner), and a generally Germanophile military and governing elite, the Horthy regime had seen in Hitler an useful ally against Hungary's traditional foes, primarily Romania. Initially, this proved to be the case: Hungary regained a significant portion of the territory split off from the crown in 1920, almost doubling in size between 1938 and early 1941 as a result of the First and Second Vienna awards.[61] This, however, was to be the only benefit of the Axis alliance. Hungary's 207,000-strong Second Army was decimated at Voronezh in January 1943, and the Red Army rolled across the Carpathian basin in 1944. Horthy's fair-weather friendship with Hitler evaporated swiftly, and the indigenous Hungarian fascist party, the Arrow Cross, came to power in a German-backed coup in October 1944. World War II left Hungary a wasteland in its wake. Overall, between 420,000 and 450,000 Hungarians (and around 500,000 Hungarian Jews) perished in the course of the war, while 600,000 more found themselves in captivity in the Soviet Union by the end of 1945.[62] The siege of Budapest left over 70% of the city in ruins—roughly equal to the level of destruction visited upon Berlin in the last months of the war—and the Red Army's brutal treatment of the population of Budapest also mirrored its behavior in the German capital.[63] Industrial production in May 1945 was only 30% of the prewar level, and during the winter of

[61] Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century,* p. 204.

[62] These numbers are based on the population of Hungary after the Second Vienna Award. Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, p. 216.

[63] Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 70. See also Andrea Pető, "Átvonuló hadsereg, maradandó trauma—Az 1945-os budapesti némi erőszak esetek emlékezete," *Történélmi Szemle,* Vol. 41, Nos. 1-2 (1999). For a thorough contemporaneous account of Budapest in the aftermath of World War II, see József Kővágó, *Budapest on the Threshold of Winter 1945-46: Report on General Conditions in the City* (Budapest: Budapest Székesfőváros Házinyomdája, 1945).

1945-46, most Magyars lived on less than 1000 calories per day.[64] Postwar inflation led to the worst hyperinflation in recorded history in 1946. Prices increased by 12 percent *hourly* in the late spring, and by July the *pengő* had reached an exchange rate of 5 quintillion (50^{30}) to the dollar.[65]

Many elements that would later figure largely in the communist system originated during the war and in the postwar period. Grocery rationing was imposed in the waning months of the war. Compulsory production quotas for farmers were introduced in 1946 as the economy collapsed.[66] Immediately after the war over 27,000 Magyars were tried for war crimes, 40,000 were interned in camps, and another 62,000 lost their jobs in an ominous precedent for the communist politicization of the legal system.[67] Nor did this process cease at war's end. As László Karsai notes, "Between 1945 and 1948, the police arrested thousands of people for political reasons other than war crimes. These arrests were somewhat random. Often, they occurred because of denunciations and even personal vendettas."[68] Magyars had been subjected to an interventionist state and politicized, seemingly random legal prosecutions well before the communists seized power.

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[64] Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 245-246, Kővagó, *Budapest on the Threshold of Winter*, p. 40.

[65] Ivan Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe 1944-1993*, p. 6, Nigel Swain, *Hungary: The Rise and Fall of Feasible Socialism* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 36.

[66] Peter D. Bell, *Peasants in Socialist Transition: Life in a Collectivized Hungarian Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 115.

[67] László Karsai, "The People's Courts and Revolutionary Justice in Hungary, 1945-46," in *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and its Aftermath,* edited by István Deák, Jan T. Gross, and Tony Judt, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 233.

[68] Peter Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 149. See also *Törvenytelen szocializmus* (Budapest: Zrínyi Kiadó/Uj Magyarorsazag, 1991), edited by Valéria Révai, pp. 15-42.

The politics of the immediate postwar period affected the genesis of communist rule in two other important aspects, most notably land reform and the nationalization of industry. Discontent with the Horthy regime during the interwar period had focused on its antidemocratic tendencies (mainly the stringent property qualifications for the franchise and the absence of secret balloting outside of urban areas—thus, for the majority of the population) and its unwillingness to seriously contemplate breaking up the noble estates. The catastrophic effects of the war were (rightly, to some extent[69]) blamed on this interwar conservative elite, which vanished from the political sphere practically overnight. In its wake the Smallholders' Party, the Social Democrats, and other political parties attempted to capitalize on the popular demand for a more egalitarian political system and, above all, land reform. Given the ongoing occupation of the country by the Red Army, despite its poor showing in the 1945 elections the Communist Party (MKP)[70] retained control of all key ministerial posts throughout the period. For the most part, only those measures tolerated by the Party were carried out. Biding its time, the Party came out in favor of land reform, despite its "regressive" character, as a means of winning over the peasantry to its cause.[71]

Unlike land reform, the nationalization of industry was fully in accordance with socialist precepts. It also enjoyed both precedent and, in the wake of the havoc wrought

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[69] There was also a marked degree of popular support for the war, and the Holocaust—in Hungary as everywhere else in Central Europe—would not have been possible without some degree of support, feigned ignorance, and/or apathy from ordinary Magyars. These issues of collaboration and complicity are far too weighty to tackle here: see Deák, et. al., editors, *The Politics of Retribution* on the general issue of postwar trials throughout Europe, and Karsai, "The People's Courts," and Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets*, pp. 141-149, on the Hungarian case.

[70] The Hungarian Communist Party (*Magyar Kommunista Párt*, or MKP) was renamed the Hungarian Workers' Party (*Magyar Dolgozók Pártja*, or MDP) after its merger with the Social Democrats in 1948.

by World War II, popular support as well. In the 1930s, the Hungarian economy had already been characterized by a high level of state intervention and manipulation. This trend was only exacerbated during wartime.[72] It was also not an unpopular measure: As Tony Judt notes, "the idea that a well-planned economy meant a richer, fairer, and better-regulated society was taken up by a very broad constituency," in Hungary as throughout postwar Europe. The late 1940s saw increased support for a planned economy by many factions in the established capitalist states of Western Europe as well; in this regard, the Hungarian Communist and Social Democratic parties made less strange bedfellows than the Social Democratic and newly-emergent Christian Democratic parties in many western European states.[73] There were, therefore, no significant barriers to nationalization under the coalition government. Mines and several major factories were taken over by the state as early as 1946. In November of the next year, the banking system was also nationalized. To return to the broader European context for comparison, even at this point Hungary was no more nationalized than France. According to Nigel Swain, its initial version of the Three-Year Plan (1947-1949) "was scarcely more interventionist than France's Monnet Plan." In this regard, much of the Communist Party's dirty work had already been done by early 1948, when it abandoned the pretense of operating as a coalition partner and assumed direct control. All major enterprises were nationalized in

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[71] In this the MKP was no different from its colleagues throughout Eastern Europe—or, for that matter, the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War. I discuss land reform at greater length in Chapter 2.

[72] Andrew C. Janos, *The Politics of Backwardness in Hungary 1825-1845* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 238-312, and Martha Lampland, *The Object of Labor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 131-135.

[73] Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005), pp. 38, 67-77.

March of 1948, after which over 3/4 of all workers were employed by the state,[74] and the stalinization of Hungary proceeded apace.

In Hungary the programmatic characteristics of the plan were industrialization—with an emphasis on heavy industry rather than consumer goods—and the collectivization of agriculture. In material terms, this called for production targets that in retrospect seem absurdly high. The First Five-Year Plan (1950-54) called for increasing industrial output by 204 percent by the end of the plan. This goal was raised to a staggering *380* percent at the 1951 party congress.[75] The workforce necessary for this headlong rush was to be drawn from the labor surplus resulting from the collectivization of agriculture and the mobilization of women, who entered the workforce in large numbers. Between 20 and 36% of the national income was channeled into industry during this period, a percentage roughly seven to nine times interwar levels.[76] This process was to be accompanied by the widespread construction of culture houses, libraries, and crèches, and a massive expansion of the educational system specifically targeting working-class and peasant youth. A number of mass organizations were created—chief among them the Democratic Association of Hungarian Women (*Magyar Nök Demokratikus Szövetsége*, or MNDSz) and the Association of Young Workers (*Dolgozó Ifjúság Szövetsége*, or DISz)[77]—to help the Communist Party (MDP) mobilize and organize the masses, to serve as "transmission belts" from the regime to its subjects. On

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[74] Swain, pp. 36-38. Although France was an extreme example of the Western European trend towards nationalization, similar efforts are apparent in every European state. See Judt, *Postwar*, pp. 63-77.
[75] Ivan T. Berend, *Evolution of the Hungarian Economy 1848-1998*, Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 2000), p. 283.
[76] Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century,* p. 275.
[77] I deal with the MNDSz and DISz at some length in Chapters 3 and 4.

paper, these measures were not ineffective. According to official statistics, industrial output grew by 20% annually during this period. Both pig iron and rolled steel production roughly doubled, while aluminum production tripled.[78] Collective and state farms spread swiftly across the Hungarian countryside: 500 such farms in 1949 swelled to 5224 in early 1953, while the amount of land under state tillage increased from 54,912 to 1,706,025 hectares in the same period.[79] The actual success of the Plan is much more difficult to measure, as we shall see shortly; however, the social and demographic results of this pell-mell industrialization and collectivization were immediately apparent.

Hungarians flooded to the cities to work in factories. At least 150,000 peasants left the countryside for the cities in the period 1949 to 1953. Over 300,000 artisans and small craftsmen, and 75,000 bureaucrats and entrepreneurs, were likewise forcibly channeled into new occupations. More Magyars moved from the country to the city, and from agriculture into industry, during these five years than had done so during the entire interwar period.[80] The bulk of these immigrants found themselves in Budapest, which grew from its postwar low of 900,000 to 1.9 million by 1956, primarily (79%) as a result of immigration from the countryside; the capital swelled in size to become the third largest city in Eastern Europe.[81] They settled primarily in the working-class suburbs of Újpest and Angyalföld in the north, Kőbanya in the east, the VIIIth and IXth districts in

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[78] Berend, *Evolution of the Hungarian Economy*, p. 285.
[79] Joseph Held, *The Modernization of Agriculture: Rural Transformation in Hungary, 1848-1975* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1980), p. 372.
[80] Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, p. 275.
[81] László Varga, "The Devastation of Budapest in War and Its Role in the Revolution, 1945-1956," in, *Budapest: A History from its Beginnings to 1998*, edited by András Gerő and János Poór, (Boulder: Social Scince Monographs, 1997), p. 191.

south Pest, and Csepel.[82] Driven off the farms and out of smaller industrial schemes into huge factories, the new urbanites were forced into radically new modes of life and labor.

In both the villages and the cities, the economic realities of life in communist Hungary left much to be desired. Over-investment in heavy industry left scant surplus for the production of even the most basic staples of life: the rationing of flour, eggs, meat, and lard was reintroduced in late 1951.[83] Many goods were entirely unavailable or could only be purchased on the black market. Housing availability in Budapest lagged far behind demand. 650,000 new apartments would have been required to address the shortfall, but only 14,000 were built every year; moreover, according to a 1954 survey, fully 1/5 of the available housing was structurally unsound or in need of total renewal. Many apartments lacked water and electricity, as did entire villages well into the 1960s.[84] Above all, Magyars found themselves working longer hours for less money for goods that now cost more than they had before. Although real wages had risen to 90% of their 1938 level by 1949, they fell back down to 66% of that mark by 1952. Clothing, shoes, and many other manufactured goods were prohibitively expensive: one young technician recounted how he and his friends would "build up," or save for, a new coat or suit over the course of a year.[85] This widespread poverty leveled the differences between occupations—in 1951, both skilled industrial workers and doctors made around 1800 forints per month (unskilled workers in agriculture, roughly half that)—but, overall, by

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[82] Imre Bencze and Erszébet Tajti, *Budapest: An Industrial-Geographical Approach*, (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1972), p. 135.
[83] Litván, *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956,* p. 22.
[84] Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century,* pp.280-81.
[85] CUHRP, Interview 133, Box 8, pp. 36-37.

early 1953 most Magyars were considerably worse off than they had been in 1948.[86] In short, widespread social and economic dislocation and hardship were the handmaidens of stalinization in Hungary.

Modernization and crime are inextricably linked; high-modernist schemes to rapidly transform societies, even more so. As rural populations abandon the village for the city and the farm for the factory, they are subjected to new and unfamiliar modes of social, economic, and cultural interaction. They become enmeshed in monetary economies, and most often in low-earning jobs: whereas they had previously been able to grow or trade for most goods, they are now forced to pay for much of what they need even as they are exposed to tempting new commodities. They also abandon the predictability of rural life and the familial and interpersonal ties that served as both a sanction on antisocial behavior and a safety net in rough times.[87] At the same time, the behavior of these transient populations is rendered more legible in the administration's purview. Criminal or deviant acts that would have previously gone unnoticed are much more likely to draw unwelcome attention from the state, whose regulatory gaze is shaped by the biases (patriarchal, class-based, ethnic, national, religious, and so on) of its planners, administrators, and monitors.[88] As a result of all these factors, urbanization generally results in a spike in crime rates. Crime and urbanization followed this pattern in England, France, and Germany in the nineteenth century, as did tsarist Russia up to the

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[86] Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century,* pp. 275, 280.
[87] Louise Shelley, *Crime and Modernization: The Impact of Industrialization and Urbanization on Crime* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981), pp. 3-37.
[88] Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, p. 82. On this latter point see especially Richard Johnson, *Urbanization and Crime: Germany 1871-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 2.

eve of the revolution.[89] Although Budapest and the other urban centers of Hungary had had previously weathered episodes of this type, nothing remotely like the demographic shift of the period 1948 to 1956 had ever occurred before.[90] The regional distribution of crime in communist Hungary conforms to this model, as Budapest and the other heavily-urbanized regions of Hungary had significantly higher crime rates than the rest of the country: in 1954, Budapest's crime rate of 2637 per 100,000 people dwarfed the national average of 1738:100,000.[91] Societal and economic tensions that had taken generations to diffuse elsewhere were compressed into a span of less than a decade. This social and economic dislocation was further exacerbated by popular antipathy towards the regime.

The degree of popular support for communism in Eastern Europe has long been a matter of some debate. With the exception of Czechoslovakia, no state in this region had a native communist party of any significance during the interwar period, and during this time their relations with the Soviet state were for the most part not friendly.[92] In Hungary, Béla Kun's 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic had engendered much opposition, while Russian complicity in the suppression of the 1848 revolution had long been a source of national animosity.[93] During World War II, Poland and Hungary especially had been subjected to murder, robbery, and rape in the wake of the Red Army. To these recent and historic animosities we must add the aforementioned hardships incurred in the

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[89] Shelley, *Crime and Modernization*, pp. 31-36.
[90] The closest parallel is the period leading up to World War I, in which the population of Budapest grew from 717,000 to 930,000 between 1900 and 1913. Károly Vörös, "Birth of Budapest: Building a Metropolis, 1873-1918," in *Budapest*, edited by Gerő and Poór, p. 104.
[91] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (F) / 70 ő.e., p. 300.
[92] Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe 1944-1993*, pp. 16-17.
[93] Mevius, *Agents of Moscow,* pp. 54-55, 69.

course of stalinization. On the other hand, there were a number of reasons one might support the communist project. The political right had led the country to disaster in World War II. The egalitarian and progressive promise of socialism genuinely appealed to idealists. Peasants, the working poor, and women enjoyed greater access to education and opportunity than was previously imaginable. Others saw in the party the opportunity for protection, profit, or revenge. The relatively-free election of 1945—in which the Party polled 17% of the total vote, roughly even with the Social Democrats and well behind the moderate-conservative Smallholders (57%)[94]—is probably the most accurate index available of communism's popularity in the immediate postwar period.

It squandered this support in short order. Regime propaganda—which sought to co-opt Hungarian national sentiment for its own ends, and rewrite its history in accordance with the precepts of historical materialism—failed miserably. As Mevius argues, "Sovietization of national symbols did not sell socialism but was regarded instead by many as an insult…. For all their national propaganda, the Hungarian communists were unconvincing patriots."[95] Although the Party rapidly ballooned in size—from a postwar low of 3000 members in late 1944 to 1.2 million in 1949[96]—this did not necessarily indicate support for the communist project: joining the MDP or one of its subsidiary mass organizations was often necessary for admission to university,

[94] Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century,* p. 230.
[95] Mevius, *Agents of Moscow*, pp. 267-268.
[96] Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets*, p. 45, Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe 1944-1993*, p. 49.

promotion, or other benefits to be derived from the system.[97] The members of these organizations often avoided paying their membership dues and dodged meetings. The DISz seems to have had particular trouble in this regard: in a representative case, the youth organization managed to sign up almost half of the young workers at the Gheorgiu Dej shipyard, but only 10% actually paid their dues.[98] One DISz member—actually the secretary of the organization in his army unit—recalled that

> I did not do much as a secretary. I called a meeting every month. Mostly we told stories and joked, also we built a sport field which earned me quite a distinction I did not expect. One day I was surprised to receive the distinction of a so-called "good secretary." The whole thing did not mean to me anything.[99]

A group of students in the small town of Békéssámson even used their local DISz organization as a front for their printing of anti-regime pamphlets.[100] Most refugees pegged the number of actual "true believers" in the party at 10% or less.[101] One 1953 escapee elaborated on the fragile nature of the support for communism: "if the members of the communist party heard that the Americans are coming, 50% would desert immediately. 25% would wait to see if the news were true, and only about 25% would

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[97] One 1956 refugee elaborated on this point at some length: "I personally would say that nobody had to enter the party. They exerted more or less the same pressure on everybody and everybody knew what advantages, what limitations and what obligations were meant by party membership. In other words, everybody had the choice between a life which seemed more secure and easier and between continuous insecurity, being endlessly annoyed and altogether very difficult living conditions. For instance, job advancement for a non-party person was practically impossible. A party member could get to travel abroad, he would be in a higher salary bracket, would be considered first for vacation benefits." CUHRP, Interview 120, Box 8, pp. 61-62.

[98] MOL M-KS-276 f. 88 / 849 ő.e., "Feljegyzés a Gheorgiu Dej Hajógyár DISz szervezetenek munkájáról," 10 June 1954, n.p.

[99] CUHRP Interview 211, Box 11, P. 29.

[100] Litván, *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956*, p. 34.

[101] See, e.g., OSA/RFE Items 2750/54, mf 36, OSA/RFE Items 10303/55, mf 61, OSA/RFE Items 11627/55, mf 62, and CUHRP Interview 208, Box 11, p. 59.

remain communists."[102] Another directly linked the MDP's unpopularity to its failure on the economic front: "Should the Communist regime have meant material welfare, 50% of the population would have accepted it. In the given circumstances about 97% of the population was anti-communist."[103] Those who benefited from some aspect of the communist project—high school and university students, for instance—did not become automatons as a result. They still resented other aspects of the regime, and transgressed its prescriptions. Benefiting from the expanded educational system did not stop students from circulating western literature and VOA pamphlets and cutting Russian classes.[104] One high school student related how he believed in the egalitarian promise of communism in the abstract, but hated the Russians and the Hungarian communist regime for their obvious failure to live up to Marx's precepts.[105] Widespread dissatisfaction with the regime and the aforementioned underlying societal and economic tensions were the main challenges confronted by the communist legal apparatus.

After 1948, Hungarian law and criminological practice were brought into line with the Soviet model. In the USSR, criminal law and its administration served a "nakedly instrumental" purpose as a political weapon to be wielded in the interests of the consolidation and exercise of the regime's prerogatives.[106] Communist criminology held that criminal behavior was either a result of bourgeois tendencies not yet eradicated by burgeoning class consciousness, or the direct result of ideological contamination from

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[102] OSA/RFE Items 8674/53, mf 27, p. 2.
[103] CUHRP Interview 102, Box 7, p. 33.
[104] OSA/RFE Items 2081/51, mf 1.
[105] OSA/RFE Items 1992/54, mf 35.
[106] Peter Solomon, *Soviet Criminal Justice Under Stalin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 447.

the West. Thus, crimes against the state or economy were prosecuted much more harshly than crimes against other persons; the severity of any given punishment depended in large measure on class origin, with kulaks and the *deklasszalt* ("de-classed," or ex-bourgeois) segments of society drawing the stiffest sentences. Penalties ranged from stiff fines and internal exile to imprisonment and execution. "In short, criminal law became an instrument of the class struggle."[107] This instrumentalization of law enforcement required large numbers of enforcers. The staff of the ÁVH already numbered 28,000 by 1950, while the total number of people employed by the Ministry of the Interior numbered almost 70,000 by 1955.[108] Roughly 40,000 informers were also used by the state security administration.[109] Not only the ÁVH but also the regular police were vetted for ideological reliability; likewise, the judges and lawyers of the prior legal administration were gradually replaced by more pliable and reliable legal personnel.

Hungarians were not unaccustomed to living in a repressive and intrusive regime. The interwar state had demonstrated a marked disregard for the free press, civil rights, and other niceties of democratic rule. However, the degree of repression during the early communist period was markedly more severe.[110] Whereas the prison population before World War II averaged roughly 0.09% of the population, by 1952 this had risen fourfold, to 0.36%. This number does not adequately represent the total number of people imprisoned, as those in internment camps were not included. The overall total is unknown: the 45,000 total incarcerated (in camps and prisons) reported by Rákosi in

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[107] Barna Mezey, editor, *Magyar jogtörténet* (Budapest: Osiris, 1996), p. 325. See also Borhi, *Hungary in the Cold War*, Chapter 5.
[108] Pittaway, *Eastern Europe 1939-1999*, p. 50, Borhi, *Hungary in the Cold War*, p. 211.
[109] Lájos Izsák, *Rendszerváltástól rendszerváltásig, 1944-1989* (Budapest: Kulturtrade, 1998), p. 113.

early 1953 seems low.[111] Bearing these uncertainties in mind, the total incarcerated population at the peak of stalinist repression in Hungary was probably somewhere between 0.5% and 0.8%—a high percentage by either contemporary or modern standards.[112]

Stalinist control measures efficiently crushed all open forms of dissent. Riots, strikes, and demonstrations were broken up almost immediately after they started.[113] The occasional reports of conspiracies and underground activity that leaked through the Iron Curtain throughout this period were rightly judged by their Western observers as "an expression of hope rather than of fact."[114] There is a sort of perverse one-upsmanship among scholars of Eastern Europe regarding which country suffered the most under communism, and Hungary is a contender for that dubious distinction. According to László Borhi, the degree of repression in Hungary was so extreme that it exceeded even the Kremlin's expectations:

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[110] Judt, *Postwar*, p. 193.

[111] János M. Rainer, "The New Course in Hungary in 1953," Working Paper No. 38 (Washington, D.C.: Cold War International History Project, 2002), p. 14. This CWIHP working paper is available online at http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/ACFAF2.pdf (viewed 1 December 2007).

[112] On the internment camps, see Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, p. 273. "Feljegyzés a büntetés-végrehajtás helyzetéről," 13 September 1955, in *Iratok az igázságszolgáltatás Történetéhez*, edited by Pál Solt, et. al. (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1992), p. 559. To put these figures in modern perspective, Hungary now has an incarceration rate of 0.15%. Cuba is estimated to have an incarceration rate of roughly 0.53%, and China around 0.16%. The USA's incarceration rate of 0.73% is the highest in the world. "World Prison Brief," International Centre for Prison Studies, King's College, London, http://www.kcl.ac.uk/depsta/rel/icps/home.html (viewed 1 December 2007).

[113] According to Pittaway, no strike between 1949 and 1956 lasted more than three hours. Note, however, that Lomax mentions one strike in Csepel immediately after Stalin's death that lasted for two days. Pittaway, "Control and Consent," p. 346, and Lomax, *Hungary 1956*, p. 19.

[114] "Hungary: Resistance Activities and Potentials," Study Prepared for U.S. Army Intelligence, January 1956, in Csaba Békés, et. al., editors, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution*, p. 89.

> The Hungarian Communists in their revolutionary zeal outdid Soviet expectations and persecuted more people than the Soviets thought desirable. … Kiselev [the Soviet ambassador to Hungary] deplored many aspects of Rákosi's policies, including political persecution and industrialization. Rákosi would not listen even to Stalin. Beria [the head of the Soviet NKVD] called the reign of terror in Hungary inadmissible and intolerable.[115]

Judged by the public transcript, then, the legal apparatus was a smoothly-functioning instrument of the communist state during its heyday in the period 1948 to early 1953, and one possibly—although one hesitates to take Beria at face value—more authoritarian than its Soviet mentor. It is important to note, however, that this level of oppression was not constant throughout the period. Before turning to resistance, we must note the drastic effects of the New Course on crime in Hungary.

Stalin's death on 5 March 1953 ushered in an era of change throughout Eastern Europe. Rákosi and his cohort were summoned to Moscow, and after a brutal dressing-down from Khrushchev, Malenkov, and others he was removed from the premiership and replaced by Imre Nagy.[116] Nagy promptly set about reforming the system. He throttled back the pace of industrialization, peasants were allowed to leave the collectives, small-scale retail and production enterprises were decriminalized, and—most importantly for our purposes—the regime significantly backed off on prosecuting criminal behavior, even as it amnestied over 20,000 convicts.[117] This was carried out in both the spirit of destalinization and also as a response to overcrowding in the prisons and internment

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[115] Borhi, *Hungary in the Cold War*, p. 213.
[116] A transcript of the meeting is available in Békés, et. al., editors, *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956*, pp. 14-23.

camps. Nagy tried to bribe the peasants to stay in collective farms by increasing the maximum size of personal plots, but this failed miserably: 400 collective farms folded almost overnight, while the total area farmed and collective farm membership both dropped by a third. He also engineered price cuts in most consumer articles and salary increases in most industries. This resulted in significant gains for urban and factory populations: by the end of 1954, real wages had finally returned to their 1949 level. However, industrial production lagged behind the targets set by the Five-Year Plan: Nagy's reforms did not deliver the goods.[118] Stubborn resistance from the hardliners who remained in the administration and escalating Cold War tensions (West Germany joined NATO in October 1954; the Warsaw Pact was signed in May 1955) spelled the doom of this short-lived experiment. Although the New Course only lasted until April 1955, its effects on the criminal and legal apparatus—as seen in Chart 1.1—were drastic.

Crime statistics can be notoriously unreliable indices of criminal behavior. In general, they provide only a basic grasp of the activities of either criminals or their pursuers and punishers. Many crimes go unreported, and detentions without charges filed are likewise uncounted.[119] They are also subject to deliberate manipulation by vested interests.[120] The available statistics for Hungary also do not include those persons taken directly into custody by the ÁVH, thereby bypassing the courts. We must treat these

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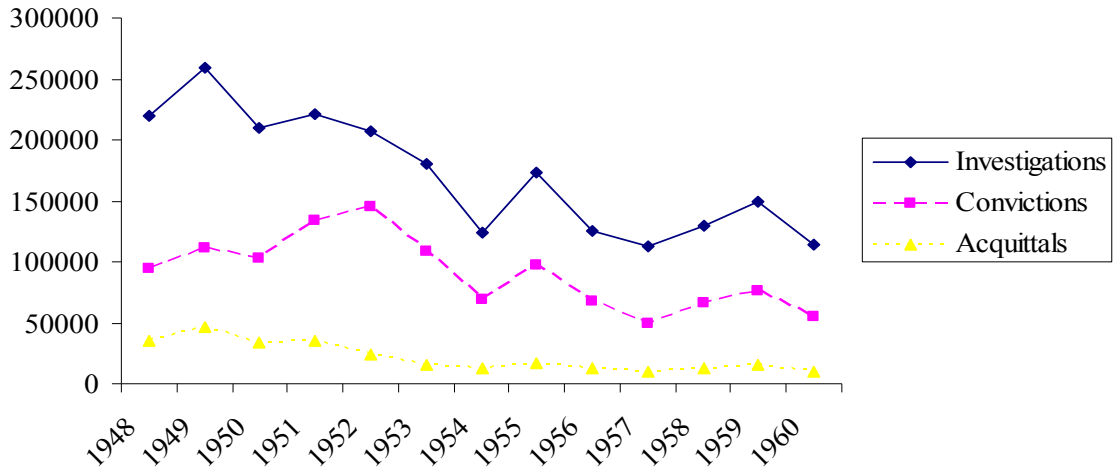
[117] Révai, editor, *Törvénytelen szocializmus*, p. 136. Gati's assertion that 174,800 people were freed in the amnesty (*Failed Illusions*, p. 57) must be inaccurate, as it is almost four times the number of people who were actually imprisoned. This was probably the total number of sentences commuted or lessened.
[118] Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, p. 296-298.
[119] Moreover, I have no statistics on recidivism rates. As Sándor H.'s experience (see pp. 31-32, above) indicates, these might have been quite high.

Chart 1.1 Investigations, Convictions, and Acquittals, 1948-1960[121]



figures with some caution. Generally speaking, however, crime rates fluctuate for one of three reasons:

1. An actual change in the number of crimes committed,
2. Official revision of what constitutes criminal behavior, and/or
3. Structural changes in the detection and prosecution of criminal behavior.

The precipitous decline in crime rates after early 1953 was contingent upon all three of these factors. Magyars responded to Nagy's less-oppressive regime by committing fewer crimes even as the legal apparatus scaled back the scope of its operations and became more selective about the cases it chose to pursue. For instance, arson cases had risen

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[120] William J. Chambliss, "The Politics of Crime Statistics," in *The Blackwell Companion to Criminology*, pp. 452-470.

steadily since the start of communist rule, peaking at 4856 cases in 1952; after the advent of the New Course, they drop off to 3493 cases in 1953, and 1569 cases in 1954.[122] Unless an increase in pyromania is somehow a corollary effect of stalinization, this must be interpreted as a decrease in the actual number of incidents of this type. This absolute decline in criminal behavior was mirrored by a sharp drop in crimes such as embezzlement, crimes against the plan, the misuse of state funds, and the portmanteau category of "crimes against the public supply" (*közellátás érdekét veszélyeztető bűncselekmény*). As one of the key instrumental purposes of the legal system was to regulate the economy—and, as we shall see in the next section, criminal behavior of this type was endemic throughout the period—we can safely assume that these falling rates resulted from a relaxation of the regime's prosecution of these acts. On the last point, it seems likely that the frenetic pace of stalinist oppression had taxed the investigators and courts almost to the breaking point, as both branches of the system immediately sloughed off as many cases as possible once the tempo was decreased. In the second half of 1953, detectives investigated 32% fewer cases than they had in the same period the previous year. The courts also began dismissing many more cases outright: whereas prior to the New Course only 18.7% of cases investigated were dropped before going to trial, afterwards this percentage rose dramatically, to 31.3%.[123] The courts also severely curtailed the use of the penal sanction, as is apparent in Chart 1.2.

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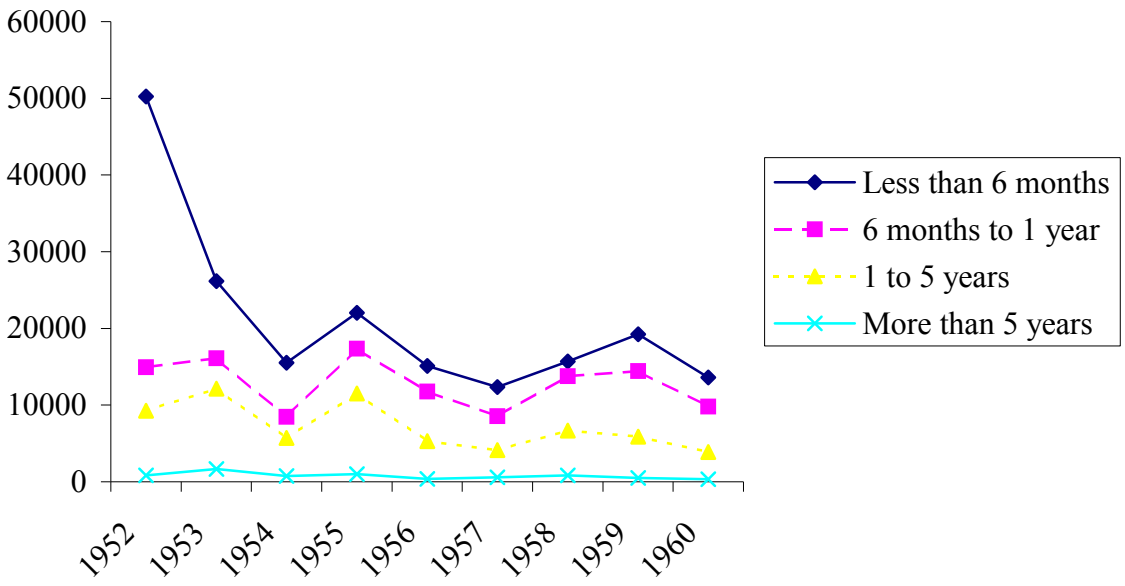
[121] *Statisztikai Évkönyv 1949-55, 1957, 1960,* pp. 355-358, 343-346, and 357-363, respectively. This is the public transcript of the regime's activities, and therefore suspect; surprisingly, perhaps, these figures do not diverge significantly from those in a confidential government report on crime between 1951 and 1955 (MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (F) / 70őe, p. 314a).

[122] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (F) / 70őe, p. 314a.

[123] Révai, editor, *Törvenytelen szocializmus,* p. 198, *Statisztikai Évkönyv 1949-55*, pp. 355-358.

Chart 1.2 Number and Duration of Prison Sentences, 1952-1960[124]



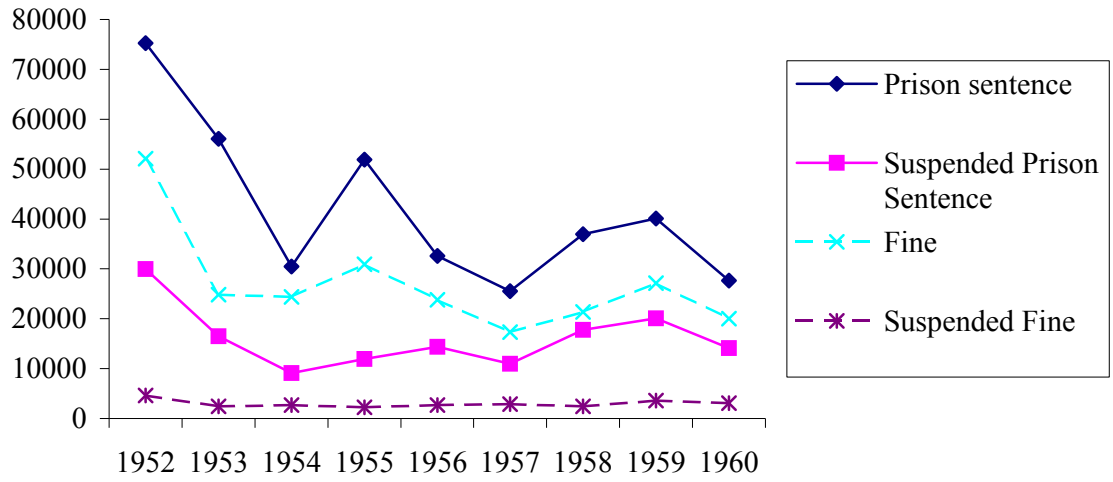
The total number of sentences in 1954 was less than half that in 1952. Most of this change comes from the lower end of the criminal spectrum: minor crimes, which had previously earned sentences of six months or less, now went largely unpunished. Predictably, these trends were reversed when Rákosi came back into power in 1955.

Although regime prosecutions did not return to their 1948-1952 levels, a significant increase is obvious across the board. During the earlier stalinist period, the overcrowded state of the prisons and internment camps necessitated the suspension of a high proportion of prison sentences (i.e, 40% of all prison sentences in 1952). This did not mean that these convicts got off scot-free: the vast majority of them had been

[124] *Statisztikai Évkönyv 1949-55, 1957, 1960,* pp. 355-358, 343-346, and 357-363, respectively.

remanded in custody for some time before their trial, and many of them suffered additional penalties in the form of fines and "exclusion from public affairs" (*közügyektől éltiltás*), in essence a ban on holding any public office, for years afterwards. The gap between suspensions and sentences served actually narrowed during the New Course (see Chart 1.3). The return to stalinist policy in 1955 saw a marked increase in sentences but no corollary rise in suspensions, which bespeaks both the initial severity of the crackdown and the comparatively uncrowded state of the prisons at the outset of restalinization. (On the other hand, fine suspensions remain roughly constant throughout the period). Again the legal apparatus seems to have overdone it, as by the end of 1955 prison officials were once more complaining of overcrowded jails.[125]

Chart 1.3 Prison Sentences and Fines, 1952-1960[126]



[125] "Feljegyzés a büntetés-végrehajtás helyzetéről," 13 September 1955, in Pál Solt, et. al., editors, *Iratok az igázságszolgáltatás történetéhez*, p. 556.
[126] *Statisztikai Évkönyv 1949-55, 1957, 1960,* pp. 355-358, 343-346, and 357-363, respectively.

In interpreting these figures, the historian confronts the same problem faced by the administrators of the communist legal administration: to what extent ought these data be construed as resistance? Although the aggregation of data at this level is useful for identifying the broader trends afoot, it does not adequately reflect the individual context of any given criminal act; the intent of both the criminals and officials involved is opaque. An assault on a local official could be a matter of personal animosity as readily as an attack on the state he or she represented; theft, an act born out of antipathy towards the regime or pure self-interest. Nor is it always possible to disaggregate these motives, as they often overlap: given a choice, one would presumably attack or rob the people and institutions one disliked the most.[127] In this regard, the state's practice of categorizing crimes into those committed against the state and economy versus those committed against other individuals allows some finer distinctions to be drawn.

Crimes committed against the state drop off sharply during the New Course, while interpersonal crimes rise. The former, for the most part, represents resistance; the latter, the irreducible residuum of criminal behavior in any society. Arson, again, serves as a reliable initial bellwether. In repressive regimes, cases of arson almost invariably represent a veiled attack on authority: on cooperative farm outbuildings, officials' houses, and so forth. The absolute drop in the incidences of arson indicates that this mode of

[127] Eve Rosenhaft provides a fascinating example of these embedded subjectivities in her discussion of the murder of Nazi martyr Horst Wessel in 1930. Over and above his ongoing struggle against the Communists, Wessel was also embroiled in a number of personal antagonisms: as his live-in girlfriend worked as a freelance prostitute, he was in trouble with both the local pimps—who were backed by an organized crime syndicate—and his landlady. Ironically, it was the latter that was the indirect cause of his murder: after repeated attempts to get the girlfriend to move out, she appealed to the local communist organization to intervene. The man who pulled the trigger, Alf Höhler, was a member of the crime syndicate as well as a communist. Eve Rosenhaft, *Beating the Fascists?: The German Communists and Political Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) , pp. 22-23.

resistance fell off during the period. The drop in the number of economic crimes is also instructive, as it only occurs in those crimes committed against state property and those broader offenses (e.g., speculation, counterfeiting) that affected the economy at large. In contrast, interpersonal theft and burglary increase significantly during the New Course (by 14% and 16%, respectively); the number of robberies almost doubles, and murders increase by a third. The most likely explanation for this spike is the release of many ordinary criminals in the general amnesty.[128]

A possible corollary of this argument is that Magyars responded to heightened persecution with increased anti-state activity, and that the high crime rate for late 1952 and early 1953 is not solely a function of increased repression. Some evidence supports this conclusion. In Budapest, anti-state and economic crimes in the first half of 1952 demonstrate a marked increase compared to the same period a year before—e.g., embezzlement almost doubled, factory theft almost quadrupled—even as interpersonal crimes remained roughly constant.[129] Worker absenteeism at the Csepel Ironworks reached 688 workers per day in September 1950 and 1674 per day in February 1951; by early 1952, seven to nine percent of the workforce failed to show up on any given day.[130] In the countryside, János Rainer finds that "the summer of 1952 brought the first signs of *mass* rural resistance to the system of compulsory deliveries: threshers' strikes, refusals to surrender quotas and even acts of violence occurred. Sporadic resistance flared up

[128] Although theft from the state also increases slightly during the New Course, this is probably also a result of the amnesty; moreover, these years also see an unbelievably precipitous decline in the numbers of crimes against the public supply, and it seems likely that some crimes formerly categorized as the latter crept into the former. MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (F) / 70őe, p. 314a. See also OSA/RFE Items 12648/53, mf 32.
[129] BFL XXXV. 95. e / 107 ő.e., pp. 1-3.

several times during the year."[131] By the end of the year there was "a critical shortage" of collections officers, as they stole away from their positions in the local administration to less dangerous occupations.[132] Litván argues that "the overall result of Stalinization, with its mobilization and coercion, was that by 1953, Hungarian society was close to breaking point."[133] Although reform was probably impossible while Stalin lived, when it did occur it was in response to local conditions as well as Kremlin machinations.

The longitudinal trend towards much lower crime rates, and towards a much lower variance between investigations, trials, and convictions, suggest at least one more conclusion: that throughout this period, the communist legal apparatus was in the process of reaching a workable symbiosis between its police and its courts. The Soviet example is again instructive. In the USSR, the court system did not spring into being fully-formed in 1917. It, like the Soviet police, was only gradually molded into an efficient tool of the central administration over the course of the 1930s.[134] The increasing uniformity of these indexes throughout the period suggests a similar trend for Hungary in the 1950s. High investigation rates coupled with low conviction rates suggest a fundamental discord between the police and the courts: an over-enthusiasm on the part of the police and investigators (probably working under a quota, or at least pressure from their superiors) with which the courts and prisons simply could not keep pace. The gradual

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[130] László Varga, *Budapest: A History from its Beginnings to 1998* (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 1997), pp.201-202.
[131] János M. Rainer, "The New Course in Hungary in 1953," p. 1. My italics.
[132] Rév, "The Advantages of Being Atomized," p. 343.
[133] Litván, editor, *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956*, p. 22.
[134] Solomon, *Soviet Criminal Justice*, p. 4, Paul Hagenloh, "Police, Crime, and Public Order in Stalin's Russia, 1930-1941" (PhD dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1999), p. 3.

homogenization of these trends in the late 1950s is the statistical footprint of a legal apparatus gradually reaching a workable symbiosis between its various elements.

For the bulk of the period under consideration, however, the police and courts were not smoothly-meshing cogs in the legal machine. As we turn from the big picture to what crime looked like "on the ground," we find that the legal administration—like all of the communist system—was riddled with inconsistencies, contradictions, and contradictory elements. This enabled widespread criminal and resistant behavior even as economic hardship and regime unpopularity encouraged it.

Interstices, Margins, and Borders

In order to work as intended, the communist system would have required a high degree of efficiency in the interactions between the various branches of the administration. This was profoundly not the case. Elements of the stalinist program—chiefly the overplanned nature of the economy and the unpredictable personal motives of its personnel—militated directly against its success; poor interdepartmental interaction exacerbated these problems. Many of the people who worked for the system did not blindly carry out the party-state's program. When they saw opportunities for personal profit or resistance, they seized them. The fractured and disorderly nature of the system not only enabled resistance, it encouraged it.

The centrally-planned economy suffered from two major faults: it was unable to compensate for the cumulative effects of over-planning, and it devolved into a "campaign economy" rather than the well-ordered system envisioned by its planners and managers.

The first point is relatively straightforward: the greater the degree of control desired over the economy, the greater the number of indicators—quantifiable measures such as output volume, cost per unit produced, and so forth—that must be disaggregated, reported and monitored. In Hungary, enterprises had to meet 1500 specific indicators in 1951; this ballooned to 2900 by 1953.[135] One indicator of the complexity of this task is that the state administration increased from 170,000 workers in 1949 to 280,000—or roughly one in four of all workers—by 1956.[136] This high-modernist preoccupation with legibility did not make the fulfillment of the plan easier: planners were deluged with redundant and irrelevant facts and figures even as "companies became snowed under by an increasingly incomprehensible mass of detailed instructions."[137] This confusion between industry and administration was compounded by the simple fact that centralized planning cannot operate in a vacuum. As Nigel Swain notes, "People fall sick; things break down; people make mistakes; winters are unexpectedly cold. All these have knock-on effects which must be catered for." Over and above whatever actual sabotage might have occurred, the planners were forced to constantly revise the overall plan in light of these accidental and incidental occurrences. In 1952, the five-year plan was altered 472 times; the yearly plan for 1952, 113 times. Changes in these overarching plans forced the revision of all subsidiary plans to meet the new targets. This fetishization of facts and figures is a hallmark of the rational and precise high-modernist vision—but carried to these extremes, it militated directly against its realization. At the local level, the solution to the

[135] Swain, p. 70.
[136] Swain, pp. 70-71.
[137] Berend, *The Hungarian Economic Reforms 1953-1988* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 11.

disequilibrium induced by these incessant interventions was most often a brief and intense production "campaign," in which local enterprises would rush to make up shortfalls. These campaigns, however, had their own "knock-on effects." As István Rév notes, "The result of the grain campaign is a critical shortage of fodder, the shortage of fodder will lead to the slaughtering of the animals, and the meat shortage comes next year."[138] Both of these entropic tendencies were neither the result of sabotage, as the communist press ardently proclaimed, nor were they caused solely by accidental or circumstantial obstacles. They were intrinsic to the system, and this cycle of disinformation and overcompensation led to a vicious downward spiral in the actual execution of the plan.

This inevitability of systemic malfunction provided little solace for the managers and administrators who failed to live up to the unrealistic standards imposed by the system. An extreme case is the trial of M.K., a collective farm director tried in October 1951. The collective farm he managed from January 1950 to mid-1951 failed miserably in meeting its production quotas: all told, the shortfall (as meticulously calculated by the administration) amounted to 145,650 forints' worth of crops. A scapegoat was necessary, and M.K. fit the bill. Although he had joined the party in 1945, prior to that he had been a member of the Arrow Cross; his indictment laid special stress on the fact that during the war he had often been seen in the uniform of that discredited fascist organization. He was sentenced to ten years in prison.[139] Accountants suffered similar job insecurity. One mechanical engineer interviewed in 1957 recalled that his enterprise went through six

[138] Rév, "The Importance of Being Atomized," p. 341.
[139] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) / 5 ő.e., p. 130.

accountants in two years: some went to jail, some were allowed to resign if the discrepancies were minor enough, others simply disappeared before they could be called to account for their "crimes."[140] Much as in capitalist societies, the penalties for not meeting production targets were strict. However, over-fulfilling the plan was also a dangerous tactic. Managers who exceeded expectations would find their subsequent quotas raised—a trend that threatened catastrophe if continued over time.

This bureaucratic confusion in industry was also apparent in the operations of the court system. Local courts demonstrated only a passing knowledge of the administration's sentencing standards, and reports from regional offices regularly demonstrate discrepancies between the sentences passed down and the expectations of the Ministry of Justice. One 1951 report from Szeged,[141] compiled in response to a request from the Ministry for a detailed assessment of the operations of the local courts, illustrates these disparities. The local courts got it right some of the time: for instance, one sentence, involving a market vendor who was found carrying a loaded revolver (2 years and 6 months in prison) was noted approvingly as "appropriately strict" (*megfelelően súlyos*) by the administrator compiling the report. Likewise, a post office worker who had been caught listening in on a telephone conversation between the local party and ÁVH offices was assessed an "appropriate" four-year prison sentence. For the most part, though, the sentences passed down by the local judges missed the mark. The sentences and fines passed down for dealing on the black market were consistently too

[140] CUHRP Interview 402, Box 13, p. 27.
[141] Szeged (Csongrád county) is not entirely representative, as its crime rates seem to have been well under the national average. MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (F) / 70 ő.e., p. 300.

strict. The courts did not consistently err on the side of caution, however: one kulak convicted of illegally slaughtering a pig received an "overly-lenient" sentence of three months in jail and a 1000-forint fine. Another kulak—this one guilty of withholding over a ton of wheat and fodder from the state collector—received an "ostentatiously lenient" (*kirivóan enyhe*) sentence of 7 months in jail and a 1000-forint fine. Finally, a man who was tried for smuggling two men across the border into Yugoslavia received a sentence of only 2 years and 6 months. (Of his charges, one escaped successfully and the other was captured and sentenced to five years in prison.) This sentence was clearly too lenient in the official's eyes. It is also one of the only sentences the report notes was later augmented by the Supreme Court, which tacked an additional two years onto the border guide's sentence.[142] A nationwide summary of crimes for 1950 demonstrated similar discrepancies. In this latter case even the inquisitor sent out from Budapest got it wrong: one sentence, of a 60-forint fine for a kulak caught withholding 70 kilos of wheat, escaped his notice but was caught by the department head, who scrawled "lenient!" in the margin.[143] From the standpoint of the central administration, the operations of the local courts left much to be desired.

Although many of these local deviations from the mandated sentencing norms were probably due to simple misunderstanding, some were probably deliberate. The motives behind this meddling, however, are unclear. For the early period of stalinization in the USSR, Peter Solomon notes that Soviet judges were often able to practice a fair amount of discretion in their operations: "As long as careers were not at stake, many

[142] MOL M-KS 276. f. 96 (Iü) / 8(2) ő.e., pp. 65-81a passim.
[143] MOL M-KS 276 f. 96 (Iü) / 49 ő.e., p. 414.

judges in the USSR were ready to resist orders that violated their sense of fair play."[144] One 1956 refugee, a prosecutor from Veszprém, made precisely this point in his interview:

> I would estimate that about 90% of the members of the court and the offices of the public prosecutor in Veszprém were no party members. And these 90% helped the victims of the regime as much as they could. In simple cases it was possible to make the files disappear. This could not be done on a large scale, but useful legal council could be given to the prosecuted and this we did on a large scale. …I can hardly remember a day when someone did not come to my house asking for help and although it was illegal, noone [sic] left my house without receiving council. This was nothing unique. My colleagues did the same.[145]

Although such judges and prosecutors certainly existed, the track record of the Szeged courts—in which sentences were often *more* stringent than required by the guidelines set out by the Ministry of Justice—suggests that legal personnel were not always guided by such high-minded motives.[146] Whether guided by personal motives and animosities or the desire to confound the law's operation (or both), some officers of the court manipulated the system on a regular basis.

The same ambiguity is apparent in the behavior of the police. A policeman interviewed after 1956 suggested a similar degree of empathy in the police force:

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[144] Solomon, *Criminal Justice Under Stalin*, p. 453.

[145] CUHRP Interview 401, Box 13, pp. 17-18.

[146] Indeed, the interviewer of the Veszprém prosecutor got the impression that he was somewhat an opportunist and "overly anxious to stress the spirit of resistance." CUHRP Interview 401, Box 13, pp. 42-43.

> Policemen, being mainly from peasant origin or worker origin, sympathized very much with the people. In most cases, except for severe real criminal cases, they tried to write the protocol in a lenient way at the time of the arrest.… As far as criminal cases were concerned the police were reliable. Whenever, however, they saw the degrading of the people by the regime, especially in cases of so-called social crimes, they tried to help the accused without accepting bribes. For example, the police helped the peasants wherever it could. In the cases where the peasants did not comply with the orders concerning forced delivery the police stood entirely at the peasants [sic] side. Most of the policemen were peasant boys.[147]

Other sources echo this assertion of sympathy on the part of the police.[148] Other policemen simply wanted to milk the system for all it was worth. One reported spending his evening shifts dozing and reading detective novels.[149] Yet other assessments of the police were much less glowing:

> [The aim of the police] seems not the protection of the public, but to make as much money as they can. You see them constantly challenging pedestrians to show their identifications—the inevitable outcome of such questioning being that the pedestrian pays a fee for some alleged offense.[150]

Detectives also seem to have abused their position for profit by accepting bribes and inventing reasons for searching houses.[151] The MDP was not well represented among policemen, accounting for only 30% of the force by one estimate.[152] Whether motivated by self-interest, apathy, altruism, or antipathy towards the regime, many policemen—like the judges and prosecutors discussed above—used their authority to their advantage.

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[147] CUHRP Interview 136B, Box 9, pp. 6, 9.
[148] OSA/RFE Items 6245/51, mf 3.
[149] OSA/RFE Items 12951/52, mf 15.
[150] OSA/RFE Items 8899/53, mf 28, p. 2.
[151] OSA/RFE Items 5294/56, mf 69.

Every form of labor in this legibility-preoccupied regime inevitably generated some sort of paper trail. The trick was to generate an official record of one's performance that was good enough to avoid trouble and not so good that one's superiors came to expect more on a regular basis. Many capitalized on the mass confusion that characterized state planning for their own benefit. One electrical engineer interviewed in 1957 described his job in some detail:

> An example will show you how this whole system operated. In the spring of 1954 the ministry decided that the flour mills should be electrified. It was a very stupid idea right from the beginning, since the mills established by individual owners still used the cheapest power available in the vicinity. Anyhow, our office received orders to prepare the plan for the electrification of 30 mills within one month.… I prepared a master plan and my draftsmen copied it ten times with insignificant alterations. Then I prepared another master plan which was copied 10 times again. Working rather easily I was able to prepare the 30 plans within a month and I finished them just before one of the great communist holidays, perhaps it was May 1 or so. I got a prize and a money award for my work and during that month I fulfilled my norms for half a year or more. Of course, the plans were very poor since they did not take into consideration the local conditions or the outlay of the mill. But it did not matter either, because none of the mills were electrified by 1956.… What I liked in my job was that a good expert was not pressed to work hard. He could idle all the way and still overfulfill his norms.[153]

Despite his nonchalant attitude towards his job, this technocrat advanced steadily through the ranks of his enterprise—the National Planning Office itself. He was made the head of his department in 1954, and remained in that position until his escape to the west in 1956.

Although these dissimulative strategies generally only resulted in wastage or misinformation, at times they resulted in actual damage to equipment and materiel. A

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[152] OSA/RFE Items 8058/56, mf 71.
[153] CUHRP, Interview 243, Box 13, p. 30.

petroleum expert in the state oil enterprise recounted a similar story to the above, but he also demonstrated a greater cognizance of the repercussions of these practices:

> We had a much better time under Soviet ownership. They paid better, and we could put much more over on them than their Hungarian successors…. If we fell behind in a particular period, we were not prepared to forego our bonus, but started to cook the stock records instead. We would overstate the stock figures to an extent sufficient to make up for the short-fall of delivered production, and even if they came out to check, they could never prove that the stock was not there; wherever they sought it, the missing quantity was always supposed to have just been pumped into some other tank. Having produced 90 and reported 106, we would then request x days stoppage for repairs and maintenance. We would use x - n days for repairs and produce the missing 10 during the n days. However, the trouble was that they would cut the permission for stoppage to a bare minimum, and as a result, it was the repairs and maintenance which suffered, as the time allowed was enough for repairs, but not for repairs and clandestine production. Hence the equipment deteriorated very quickly.[154]

The salient characteristics of both these cases are clear: both engineers aptly dodged the administrative procedures designed to minutely control their job performance, and they did so with the collusion of at least their immediate circle of co-workers. The strategies used by these technocratic elites were among the more subtle means of perverting the regime's goals for one's own benefit. Regular workers in factories did not enjoy the same degree of control over the official transcript of their behavior, and were forced to rely on more primitive means of manipulating the system.

Various forms of workplace dissimulation and theft were ubiquitous. Signing up to work somewhere, receiving an advance and work equipment, and then never showing

[154] CUHRP, Interview 241, Box 13, p. 12.

up again—in the manner of Sándor H.—seems to have been commonplace.[155] Workers in the food and service industries were able to augment their earnings by stealing from work or saving scarce goods for favored, well-paying customers.[156] Textile workers made up for their comparatively low wages by smuggling cloth out of their factories.[157] Shoes were often resoled with stolen transmission belts.[158] These widespread practices of covert appropriation seem to have reached their apogee in the building trades, where wages were low, raw materials were plentiful, and supervision apparently minimal. A pipe-fitter in Budapest described his job environment thus:

> We had plenty of opportunities to do black work, after our work in the plant. Everybody needed some installation work, or pipe fitting, or anything like that. We were always called to private homes to do different kinds of work. Out of the black work we could make as much money as our regular pay was [sic]. All the workers were doing the same, this was the main reason they liked the gas factory, and tried to stay there. Everybody used the material of the plant for the private works, the material was simply stolen.[159]

An electrician with a Budapest housing repair cooperative echoed this praxis. His black work added 400-500 forints per month, or almost half his income, to his salary. Like the pipe-fitter above, he also collaborated with his coworkers:

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[155] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) / 5 ő.e., pp. 137, 140, BFL XXXV. 95 e / 107 ő.e., p. 5.
[156] OSA/RFE Items 3366/55, mf 53, CUHRP Interview 102, Box 7, p. 28.
[157] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) / 5 ő.e., p. 143.
[158] OSA/RFE Items 10900/52, mf 13, OSA/RFE Items 8678/53, mf 27, OSA/RFE Items 4784/54, mf 39.
[159] CUHRP Interview 232, Box 12, pp. 232-233.

> Whenever we found ourselves on a job somewhere we tried to find something for the masons to do, as the collective did not always have work for them. Whenever they had no work they were only paid the flat rate. As "one hand washes the other," the masons would also scrounge up work for us: thus they would not start work until the power had been switched off, or they would dismantle the [electrical] main. In some cases we simply tore the main out of the wall. In this way we caused a lot of extra work for the masons.[160]

Numerous other accounts from workers in these fields recount similar experiences.[161] These workers farther down the labor hierarchy adopted much more basic means of dodging the system. The gains they made by doing so were similarly circumscribed by their relative lack of control over the official transcript generated by their work. But like their counterparts at the commanding heights of industry, they often seized the opportunity to defraud or steal from the state.

The extent of this workplace theft was remarkable. By early 1952, there were 400 investigations of factory theft per month in Budapest alone.[162] Most of the cases singled out for mention in the 1954 and 1955 Budapest police reports on factory theft involved thousands of forints' worth of goods, and quintals of raw materials; it seems likely that smaller-scale theft slipped by under the radar for the most part.[163] (It is probably no coincidence that workers in heavy industry consistently won the twice-yearly scrap-metal collection campaigns conducted by the regime.[164]) Regardless of the mixed motives

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[160] OSA/RFE Items 1646/55, mf 50, p. 6.
[161] See, e.g., OSA/RFE Items 9685/55, mf 60, and OSA/RFE Items 11392/55, mf 62.
[162] BFL XXXV. 95. e / 107 ő.e., p. 1.
[163] See BFL XXXV. 95. e / 100 ő.e. and BFL XXXV. 95. e / 103 ő.e.
[164] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 / 849 ő.e., "Feljegyzés a honvédtiszti toborszásról és a fémgyujtes eredményéről," 5 June 1952, n.p. On scrap-collecting campaigns, see MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 849 ő.e., "Feljegyzés a DISz részvételéről a fémhulladék gyüjtesben," n.p., and OSA/RFE Items 2350/55, mf 51, and OSA/RFE Items 568/53, mf 18.

behind its commission, workplace theft severely hampered the successful completion of the plan.

Although the desperate economic plight of most Hungarians was doubtless a major motivation in stealing from work, it was also widely perceived as a covert means of attacking the regime. Most Magyars interviewed both before and after 1956 concur on not only the endemic nature of workplace theft, but also its commission as a deliberate act of resistance.[165] Some jokingly referred to daily workplace theft as the "10-forint movement."[166] Others went so far as to state that "most people regard it as a *duty* because it weakens the system," or even that stealing became "a national virtue."[167] One economist summarized all three of these points—the relative ease of theft, the self-interest involved, and its political basis—in a lengthy diatribe during his 1957 interview:

[165] See, e.g., OSA/RFE Items 589/53, mf 18, OSA/RFE Items 6421/54, mf 41, OSA/RFE 2350/55, mf 51, OSA/RFE Items 3870/55, mf 53, OSA/RFE Items 4785/55, mf 54, CUHRP Interview 155, Box 10, p. 57, CUHRP Interview 232, Box 12, p. 29, CUHRP Interview 402, Box 13, p. 27, and CUHRP Interview 406, Box 13, pp. 29, 49.

[166] This was a parodic riff on communist sloganeering: of one of the "voluntary" work campaigns required workers to show up 10 minutes early for work. See CUHRP Interview 212, Box 11, p. 18, and CUHRP Interview 402, Box 13, p. 39.

[167] CUHRP Interview 208, Box 11, pp. 56-57 (my italics), CUHRP Interview 121, Box 8, p. 31.

> Why did people steal? They were obviously in need of supplementing their meager incomes and there was ample opportunity everywhere to procure something.… All kinds of materials, raw and finished, were shipped around needlessly, in a rather complicated, roundabout way. Sizeable quantities were lost track of or were forgotten in the process. Material, valued in the hundreds of thousands, was standing there rotting or disintegrating, for years.… Now who could accuse a man of stealing if, seeing the obvious waste and conscious of his own urgent need, he collected these [products], took them home, and used them as he saw fit? This is the way people viewed stealing. We must therefore sharply distinguish actual stealing from wage-supplementing (*bérkiegészités*). Stealing is that when a person steals personal belongings from another. The taking away or "procuring" of material which more or less does not belong to anybody (*félig gazdátlan dolgok elvitele*) is definitely not stealing.
>
> Aside from these factors I just mentioned, stealing was also a conscious anti-Communist action.[168]

The goods stolen from factories and shops were then traded on the black market, where systemic shortcomings were also evident.

Like the trend towards the nationalization of the economy and the politicization of the legal apparatus, the black market's origins antedate communist rule. The disruption of the domestic economy during World War II had resulted in a thriving black market. This persisted in the dire economic conditions of the postwar period despite the coalition government's attempts to control it.[169] The economy of scarcity that prevailed under the Rákosi regime provoked a return to these illicit practices. The inefficiencies of the centralized economy were most obvious in the perennial shortages of food, consumer goods, and all other commodities. Long queues in front of state department stores were

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[168] CUHRP Interview 152, Box 10, pp. 289-191.

[169] József Parádi, editor, *A Magyar Rendvédelem Története* (Budapest: Szemere Bertalan Magyar Rendvédelem-történeti Tudományos Társaság, 1996), p. 144. See also György Polák, "'Csapás' a Feketekereskedelemre," in *Korrajz 2002*: *A XX. Század Intézet Évkönyve* (Budapest: XXI Század Intézet, 2004).

commonplace, and the perennial shortages that plagued the system were generally the proximate cause of the few intermittent outright disturbances that occurred throughout the period.[170] Thus, the regime tolerated the existence of free, or "gray," markets where peasants would sell the produce and other goods they produced on their farms. They remained in operation throughout the period, but were closely monitored and periodically raided by police squads.[171] Regime propaganda provided the ideological counterpoint to the regulatory activities of the economic police, framing those guilty of speculation, hoarding, and various other illegal economic activities as menaces to society.

One example is provided by the unfortunate M.T., who was arrested for speculation in June 1952. According to *Magyar Rendőr*, M.T. had started trading on the black market after the war. She quit her job at a candle-making enterprise in 1950, and from that time had relied solely on her illegal income. The police found more than 40,000 forints' worth of goods buried in her cellar when she was arrested; worse yet, they were unused and rotting. This, the reporter concluded, was enough to reveal "the true face" of this "economic hyena:"

> With the exposure of M.T., our people's economy has again gotten rid of a malign hyena, who without batting an eye abstracted thousands of forints' worth of the public supply from the workers. The spoiled, cached textiles would have been sufficient to clothe more than 100 children.

According to the public transcript, her criminal disregard for society's needs mapped onto her private life: M.T. had abandoned her five children, who were now vagrants.

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[170] See, e.g., OSA/RFE Items 11239/51, mf 5, OSA/RFE 12004/51, mf 5, OSA/RFE Items 13405/51, mf 6, OSA/RFE Items 519/52, mf 6, and OSA/RFE Items 2822/54, mf 36.

She had likewise turned out her husband, and at the time of her arrest only kept the company of like-minded speculators.[172] She went to prison, as did over 22,000 like-minded "economic hyenas" during the period 1948 to 1956.[173] Occasional raids and ideologically-charged media coverage did not prove effective deterrents. The black market made up the difference between what the state was able to provide and what Magyars had to sell or buy, and the combination of poor regulation and economic need ensured that it remained in operation throughout the stalinist era.

The black market operated in symbiosis with the aforementioned practices of workplace resistance, albeit with significant differences. The black market was absolutely not a site of anti-regime solidarity, and black-marketeering does not seem to have acquired the same social legitimacy that accrued to workplace theft. Prices on the black market were generally substantially higher than the norm, and competition was cutthroat.[174] Despite all that, as Elena Osokina notes for the Soviet case, "the black market pumped goods and raw materials from the legal socialist economy and, to some extent, acted as its parasite in what could be viewed as a kind of economic revenge."[175] It also provided the key site of exchange for the other forms of illicit economic activity afoot in the country.

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[171] See, e,g,, OSA/RFE Items 678/52, mf 6, OSA/RFE Items 6953/52, mf 10, OSA/RFE Items 1393/53, mf 19, OSA/RFE Items 2476/53, mf 20,OSA/RFE Items 2652/54, mf 36, OSA/RFE Items 3150/54, mf 37.
[172] *Magyar Rendőr*, Vol. 6 No. 30, 26 June 1952.
[173] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (F) / 70 ő.e., p. 314a.
[174] CUHRP Interview 152, Box 10, p. 152, OSA/RFE Items 7533/55, mf 58
[175] Elena Osokina, "Economic Disobedience Under Stalin," in *Contending With Stalinism*, edited by Viola, p. 198.

This illegal trade in stolen goods was also augmented by various practices of small-scale production. Women seem to have predominated in this field. Homemade wine was a common black market product, and many women made a practice of home distilling during this period. This was potentially a lucrative trade, as a liter of 60% alcohol, which would cost 100 forints from the pharmacist, could be made at home for as little as 18 forints.[176] As the state factories produced poor-quality clothing, there was great demand for homemade clothes as well, and contracting out a state loom meant that one could manufacture clothing for sale on the black market as well, with very little risk. Piecework knitting filled the same niche, and an entire underground readymade industry sprang up in Budapest and the other major cities.[177] However, small-scale production seems to have contributed only a portion of the activity on the black market.

For the most part the black market ran on finished products and raw materials stolen from the factories and shops. A worker in the state building enterprise in Baja who escaped in 1954 recounted how he regularly capitalized upon his prior business connections (he had owned a mill prior to 1948) in his dealings on the black market. During "campaign" episodes he was even called upon by his managers to illegally

[176] OSA/RFE Items 3587/55, mf 53, OSA/RFE Items 7334/55, mf 57. OSA/RFE Items 2163/56, mf 65 describes one variant of the home distillation process at length: "A small quantity of yeast, usually 60 grams, is mixed with three liters of water [with sugar or other fermentables dissolved into it]. This is placed in a glass jar, and fermentation takes place during eight days' storage in a warm place. The resulting three liters of mash are then poured into a six- or eight-liter size cooking pot. Into the mash is placed a small wooden stand, supporting a porcelain dish which thus rests above the level of the mash. All is then covered by a basin filled with cold water, fitting tightly on the top of the pot. [It is then heated over a low flame for two and a half hours.] The alcohol fumes rise from the surface of the mash to the bottom of the basin which forms the lid. There they condense to form liquid alcohol, which drops from the bottom of the basin-lid into the porcelain dish."

[177] OSA/RFE Items 54/52, mf 6, OSA/RFE Items 1214/53, mf 3, OSA/RFE Items 235/55, mf 48, OSA/RFE Items 508/56, mf 63.

procure scarce goods needed to fulfill the factory production quota.[178] A manager in a Budapest glass factory recalled that he made a tidy profit by regularly expediting the sale of glass to unapproved customers. After his transfer to Győr in 1953 he continued doing so, and also acted as a middleman between people seeking glasswork done and private providers.[179] One account suggests that in Csepel, the state store was actually also the center of the black market.[180] The Danube also served as a conduit for illegal trade: one sailor recounted how he and his compatriots would regularly trade on the sly for watches in Vienna, leather products in Bulgaria, goosedown clothes in Romania, bicycle tires and other goods in Yugoslavia. Other firsthand sources support his claim of the waterborne trade.[181] Indeed, many of the goods for sale on the black market relied on a transnational web of illicit exchange. Even as the communist regime was unable to entirely penetrate Hungarian society, so was it was unable to close itself off from illicit exchanges with its neighboring people's democracies—or the West. In addition to the low-level smuggling that went on between the Eastern European states, two major foreign sources funneled goods into the shadow economy.

The Soviet occupiers themselves were a major source of Western goods for the black market. Soviet soldiers in occupied Austria returned to the Soviet Union through Hungary, and they were desperate to convert watches and other goods "liberated" from the Austrians into more readily-concealable cash before they got home.[182] According to

[178] OSA/RFE Items 9783/54, mf 45.
[179] OSA/RFE Items 7701/53, mf 26.
[180] OSA/RFE Items 11403/51, mf 5.
[181] OSA/RFE Items 1209/54, mf 34, p. 1, OSA/RFE Items 1315/54, mf 34, OSA/RFE Items 4785/55, mf 54.
[182] OSA/RFE Items 12232/53, mf 31.

a Győr black-marketeer who escaped in 1953, this illicit trade was conducted with little interference from the authorities. He usually resold his goods locally, but would sometimes take them on the train to deal in Budapest.[183] The Soviet-based black market in the capital was more closely monitored. Although the railroad stations themselves were heavily policed by plainclothes detectives, deal-making went on at a frenetic pace outside the immediate environs of the station. One enthusiastic young interviewee—an ex-antiaircraft gunner, who escaped in 1955 with his brother—recalled that he and his partner would generally pick up a Soviet soldier in a taxi and then conduct their business in the back seat while driving around Budapest: even though they had to cut the driver in for a share of the profits, and moved the goods directly to a fence rather than trying to resell them themselves, they still made profits of 50 to 300% on goods ranging from chocolate to nylons to cameras.[184] Other sources echo the central role of Soviet soldiers in the black economy; according to one RFE monitor writing in 1954, the activities of these soldiers "has become almost an institution of the current Hungarian economic condition."[185] This was a short-lived bonanza, as it ended in 1955 when the Red Army withdrew from Austria.[186]

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[183] OSA/RFE Items 5604/53, mf 24.

[184] OSA/RFE Items 7533/55, mf 58. Other black-marketeers recounted similar profit margins. This source also avers that smuggling, like workplace theft, lost much of its social opprobrium in the 1950s: "Smuggling has always existed. However, the attitude of society towards smuggling has undergone a considerable change since 1950. Formerly, smuggling was considered a means of making money on a large scale by shady characters. The smuggled goods were bought up but every person despised the smuggler. Today, smuggling is no longer regarded as immoral and is almost regarded by society as a good deed…. The present regime also persecutes the smugglers but the population sympathizes with the things the regime persecutes, and is an enemy of all that the regime demands." He is, however, the only one to assert this point. OSA/RFE Items 4785/55, mf 54. pp. 2-3.

[185] OSA/RFE Items 9783/54, mf 45. See also OSA/RFE Items 8840/54, mf 44, OSA/RFE Items 11493/54, mf 54, OSA/RFE Items 4785/55, and OSA/RFE 7914/55, mf 58 for other firsthand accounts of Soviet activities on the black market.

[186] OSA/RFE 7533/55, mf 58.

Packages sent by private individuals and foreign aid organizations also provided an indirect source of products for resale on the black market. The communist government did not halt all private exchanges between East and West; although parcels and letters were examined en route, familial and interpersonal connections spanned the Iron Curtain.[187] Hungarians were allowed to receive parcels via a state distribution agency, IKKA; the contents of these parcels ranged from foodstuffs to clothing to fashion magazines. Goods from the West were in high demand:

> I was able to dress exclusively from the packages I received from abroad, especially from the United States from my cousin. If there was something I couldn't use, I could always sell it in the office and among friends. People were very eager to buy anything that came from abroad.[188]

Over and above these interpersonal connections, foreign aid organizations also abetted illicit exchange in Hungary. Perhaps the most important organization in this regard was the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (the JDC, or Joint). Founded in 1914, the New York-based JDC had vastly expanded its operations in Eastern Europe after the end of World War II. By 1948, its operations in Hungary accounted for over a quarter of its expenditures, or $8.4 million; although this aid decreased over time, it still amounted to $2.2 million in 1952.[189] This money was devoted to channeling funds and supplies to Jewish organizations in Hungary, to individual aid packages for those Jews remaining in Hungary, and also to expediting the emigration of Jews to Israel. The Joint was allowed

[187] For letters received from Hungarians by relatives living abroad, see OSA/RFE Items 10715/53, mf 30, OSA/RFE Items 10718/53, mf 30, and OSA/RFE Items 11406/54, mf 47.
[188] CUHRP Interview 120, Box 8, pp. 30, 32.

to operate in Hungary up until 1953; even after its exclusion from the country in January of that year, the JDC was able to continue channeling funds to Hungarian Jews via an intermediary Switzerland-based organization.[190] As IKKA offices were regularly haunted by black-marketeers,[191] it is likely that both JDC aid and the contents of individually-sent packages swiftly found their way onto the black market. In these manners, outside sources of goods rendered the regime unable to entirely cement its control over the economy/ This flow of goods from west to east was matched by a flow of people in the opposite direction.

Many of Rákosi's unwilling subjects voted with their feet. Just as the illicit economy resolutely resisted centralized control, so did the minefields, barbed-wire fences, and watchtowers that made up the Iron Curtain fail in their intended prophylaxis. The exact number of illegal emigrants during this period is impossible to determine. Although Tibor Valuch cites a figure of 100,000 and 110,000 people who left the country in the years 1945 to 1953, he does not distinguish between legal and illegal emigration.[192] Interestingly enough, attempts to illegally cross the border actually *increase* in late 1953.[193] The most likely explanation for this phenomenon is a surge of border-crossers who were now less concerned about possible repercussions for their families, and a spate

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189 Ronald Zweig, *German Reparations and the Jewish World: A History of the Claims Conference*, Second Edition (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), p. 63. I am indebted to Zachary Levine for this and the following reference.

190 Memorandum from Charles Jordan to Moses Leavitt, 23 June 1955, and Memorandum from Charles Jordan to Jeannette Robbins, 23 June 1955, American Joint Distribution Committee, Joint Distribution Committee Archives, New York.

191 OSA/RFE Items 11514/55, mf 62.

192 Tibor Valuch, "Changes in the Structure and Lifestyle of Hungarian Society in the Second half of the Twentieth Century," in *Social History of Hungary from the Reform Era to the Twentieth Century,* Gábor Gyáni, György Kövér, and Valuch, editors (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 2004), pp. 533-535.

193 MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) /

of freshly-amnestied ex-convicts who made it their first priority to get out for good.[194] The numbers only increased during Rákosi's 1955 return to power. In that year, there were 1104 Magyars convicted for attempting or planning to cross the border illegally. Their salient characteristics are as follows:

1. A vast majority (874, or 80%) were under the age of 30.
2. Over 67% were of worker or peasant class origin.
3. Just over 60% of them were heading to Austria.
4. Most had no political allegiance, although 60 were currently or had been in the MDP, and another 212 had been in the DISz.
5. Their recorded motives were:

Swayed by enemy propaganda	27
Fleeing prosecution for a crime	115
Adventure-seeking or wanderlust (*kalandvágyból*)	548
Smuggling	74
Family reasons	258
Evading military service	5
Other reasons	77

Moreover, almost three-fourths were arrested planning their escape; only 298 were actually arrested in the border zone.[195] It is impossible to determine how representative this sample is, what percentage of actual escapees they represent, or how much the border-crossers were able to conceal their real motives, goals, or destinations. This particular transcript is very well hidden indeed.

Fortunately, the Radio Free Europe interviewers often asked their interviewees about their escapes as well as their lives in Hungary. They also interviewed a number of border guards who fled, and even a few border guides. Their reports of conditions at the border reveal that crossing over was indeed a risky undertaking. Cash awards and leave

[194] State Security Historical Archive (Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára, or ABTL) 1.11.9.

were offered to guards who caught escapees. Border guards were also told that even if escapees had made it to Austrian soil, they were to shoot them and then drag the bodies back across the border.[196] One woman lost her husband in the Danube; an engaged couple barely escaped in a hail of bullets. Stories such as these are common.[197] However, most of the escape stories also suggest that the same systemic malfunctions that pervaded the rest of the legal apparatus were in equal effect at the border.

Border fortifications were not well maintained, and border guard units not well organized. Coupled with the fact that border guards (albeit a branch of the ÁVH) were as poorly-paid as policemen, this led to oversights and mishaps both deliberate and accidental. A 1952 escapee, a technician at the Szentpéterfa power station, recounted that the guards in that border district had let the minefields and barbed-wire fences fall into disrepair; they often turned a blind eye to escapees, listened to western broadcasts, and shot fowl on duty to sell to local villagers. A Hegyeshalom border guard who escaped in 1955 reported that his unit seldom knew its orders until just before they went on duty, large stretches of the border were left unpatrolled, discipline was slack, and absenteeism high. As a consequence, few border-crossers were caught.[198] The border at Gasztony seems to have been particularly poorly-run: guards would sleep or play cards while on duty during the winter, officers would seldom check on them, and excess food was traded to villagers on a regular basis. In many places the barbed wire lay on the ground, and the

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III/1. d. 11, p. 19.
[195] This is an increase from 853 cases in 1954. ABTL 1. 11. 9. III/1. d. 11, pp. 19-21.
[196] OSA/RFE Items 8093/55 , mf 58.
[197] OSA/RFE Items 10210/55, mf 61, and OSA/RFE Items 8387/56, mf 73.
[198] OSA/RFE 3072/53, mf 21, OSA/RFE Items 2857/55, mf 52.

minefield was so harmless that the post's guard dogs would "play, gambol, and roll around" in it "like bad children." This guard recounted that his unit caught only one escapee in a six-month period.[199] Although this was the most extreme account of negligence in the archives, many of them tell similar stories: border obstacles in disrepair, inefficient operation of the border posts, dealing on the sly with local villagers.

As a result, several of the personal accounts of escape in the Radio Free Europe archives are curiously dull. Although most escapees went solo or in pairs, more difficult crossings were not unusual. A 17-year old cripple made his way across the border into Yugoslavia in 1953, and thence into Austria in 1954. Entire families were able to cross illegally into Austria without mishap. A lawyer from Vamosgyork had little difficulty getting across the border with his wife and daughter in 1953. One man—who, according to his RFE interviewer, "might better be described as a commuter," crossed and recrossed the border three times between 1947 and 1956. On the second occasion in 1950, he brought out his pregnant wife and daughter. They re-defected to Hungary, but were subject to intense harassment by the regime. They decided to escape again, and did so in January 1956; on his last trip, he brought out his wife and both children as well as two other families. According to another young man from Szombathely, he and his companion practically strolled across the border; they saw nobody guarding the obstacles at the border, and crossing into Austria "was like going across the street."[200] Perhaps the best escape story in the Radio Free Europe archives—one that begs recapitulation, and

[199] OSA/RFE Items 9380/55, mf 60.
[200] OSA/RFE Items 10200/53, mf 29, OSA/RFE Items 4538/54, mf 38, OSA/RFE Items 797/56, mf 64, OSA/RFE Items 5277/56, mf 69.

one that also illustrates the manner in which these interstitial, marginal, and border weaknesses compounded and fed off each other—is that of four men who fled together in December 1955.

They all worked for the state trucking company, and were lucky enough to be assigned together to duty in the border zone near Szombathely. Having examined the border obstacles in the course of their work, they resolved to steal one of the firm's 3½-ton trucks, armor the sides and bottom with 8mm steel plate, and drive it through the minefield. Having made the necessary alterations to the truck (with materiel either heisted from work or acquired on the black market) they bribed the night watchman of the motor pool with a week's worth of meal vouchers and set out in the early hours of 8 December 1955. Although they were stopped by police, they were able to talk their way out of trouble. Despite getting lost at one point, they were soon at the border. They drove headlong most of the way through the border obstacles before a mine disabled the truck, and then

> They jumped out of the truck with their parcels under their arms and jumped into the river Pinka. The water was only chest-high but the current was very strong and they had to swim. They lost their caps and parcels but reached the opposite side safely. After a few moments' rest, they saw red and white signals flashing through the night on the Hungarian side of the river, and heard shots fired….

> Their clothing and hair were frozen stiff. After two hours of wandering, they reached a road which led them to Nemetlovo after a short walk. There, they knocked on the window of one of the houses. Here, visitors arriving at uncommon hours were common. They did not have to say anything; the occupants of the house knew what their visitors were. Their host greeted them in Hungarian, which added to their joy: they had found someone to tell their tale to. After a hot breakfast, in dry underclothing and wrapped in warm blankets, they rested for awhile…. Their 65-year-old host insisted on taking them to the road, to keep them from getting lost and returning to Hungary by mistake.[201]

The story sounds fantastic. However, independent confirmation is available: their arrival in Austria was widely reported in the press (they were denied political asylum, and their future exploits are unknown),[202] and the armored truck, as it turned out, was taken to a Szombathely repair shop shortly after the incident. A mechanic at this shop, who escaped in March 1956 himself, recalled seeing the truck and recounted its impact on his coworkers to his RFE interviewer:

> The workers really liked it, and talked about it to each other nonstop. The source recalled someone saying "Now that's a progressive work method!" (*Na ez aztán a haladó munkamódszer*!)[203]

At some irreducible level this success story is due to ingenuity and pure dumb luck. However, it was also made possible by poorly-guarded trucks and materiel, readily-bribable night watchmen, bad police work, and shoddy border controls—all characteristic features of the communist system. The communist regime failed not only at the border, but also in the offices, the courts, the factories, and the markets. Fleeing communist

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[201] OSA/RFE Items 11392/55, mf 62. English translation.
[202] "Evaluation Comments," OSA/RFE Items 11392/55, mf 62.
[203] OSA/RFE Items 3436/56, mf 67.

Hungary was not easy—but then neither was staying. Both options were greatly aided by the various shortcomings of the system detailed above.

* * *

The effects of communism in Hungary were not simply those of a foreign ideology forced upon a recalcitrant society. Its high-modernist ideology readily seized upon nascent trends already present in the Hungarian political and economic system. A tendency towards centralization and a drive to catch up to the industrialized West had been apparent since the nineteenth century, and it persisted during the interwar, wartime, and immediate postwar periods. The distinctive features of the communist system imposed after 1948 were the frenetic pace with which it set about accomplishing these high-modernist goals, and its instrumental use, or abuse, of the legal system to accomplish these ends.

The industrialization and urbanization of the country would have generated a certain degree of resentment and antipathy regardless of the specific content of its guiding ideology. Modernization forces people into new modes of social and economic interaction, and some degree of conflict invariably ensues. However, in the Hungarian case, these underlying tensions were channeled into anti-regime sentiment. Rákosi and the MDP sped the pace of development well past what they could safely control, and the regime rightly took the blame for the hardships suffered in the pell-mell dash to modernity. By mid-1952, the system had generated a remarkable amount of antipathy. The New Course after Stalin's death ameliorated but did not evaporate this resentment,

and the halfhearted return to doctrinaire stalinism after 1955 only whetted the popular appetite for change.

Resentment engendered resistance, and this resistance took many forms. The high-modernist scheme in Hungary foundered on over-planning and desperate stopgap measures to make up for unwanted repercussions. The result was a chaotic mess of contradictory and impossible directives, quotas, and plans. This enabled many to work the system for their own benefit. The police and courts were not immune to these dysfunctional tendencies, as personal interests often interfered with the smooth functioning of the legal administration. Workers at all levels of the labor hierarchy—from technocrats to pipe-fitters—were often able to cover their tracks in the blizzard of facts, figures, and falsehoods that buffeted the administration. Falsifying the plan, stealing from work, and doing "black work" on the company clock were all ubiquitous. These criminal acts were committed not only for personal benefit but also as resistance, in a deliberate attempt to sabotage the workings of the state: ten forints at a time.

The regime was also unable to successfully force its diktat past the margins of its authority or patrol its borders efficiently. The economy of scarcity provoked by communism provoked in turn a return to wartime practices of illicit exchange. The black market swiftly regained its wartime preeminence; now, however, its web spread beyond the borders of Hungary. The state proved as unable to subdue its operations as it was impotent to halt the steady hemorrhage of escapees to the west.

The result of these intrinsic and systemic weaknesses was that by early 1956, even the party-state's Western monitors had become aware of the substratum of discontent

underlying the apparent tectonic rigidity of the communist system. According to an intelligence survey commissioned by U.S. Army Intelligence,

> Passive resistance in Hungary is perhaps more common than in any other European satellite. There are indications that this kind of resistance has grown in intensity since the Communist coup in 1948. The abandonment of the 'new course' in early 1955 was partially responsible for this growth, and the predictable failure of the regime to achieve economic stability under a stricter program will probably continue to stimulate it."[204]

These forms of "passive" resistance—workplace theft, dissimulation, blackmarketeering, and so on—were difficult but not impossible in the urban centers of communist Hungary. As we shall see in the following chapter, they were given much fuller rein in the countryside.

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204 "Hungary: Resistance Activities and Potentials," Study Prepared for US Army Intelligence (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, 1956), in Békés, editor, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution*, p. 89.

CHAPTER 2: THE EXTRAORDINARY CAREER OF *FEKETEVÁGÓ UR*

In February of 1955, a recent escapee from Hungary was interviewed at length by a Radio Free Europe staffer. The informant, János S., had fled Hungary for fear of being arrested and interrogated by the secret police; however, this was not due to any conspiracy or overt anti-regime activity on his part. In the course of his interview, it came to light that

> János couldn't complain about his livelihood …. Every month he brought home 3000 to 4000 forints. How was this possible? He perpetually had one foot in prison because of his illegal slaughtering [here *fekete vágás*; more commonly *feketevágás*]. It was common knowledge that the penalty for illegally slaughtering one calf was six months in prison; as János did it regularly, he opined that he would be sent up for no less than five years if caught.… János was well known among the population of the countryside for his illegal slaughtering and meat selling. When a farmer had a cow ready to calve, he would call around: "you may sharpen your knife in two weeks, János." – "Okay, bring it at night, when it's born" – was the response. The illegal slaughter took place at night, and János would be distributing the meat by daybreak.[205]

According to János, he had cornered the meat market in his small town; he numbered among his customers the wives of the local party secretary and collective farm president, the local ÁVH lieutentant and two of his informers, and the two local priests. János's income from *feketevágás* and other illicit activities may have been over twice what a skilled worker could expect to make at that time; his ÁVH customer jokingly addressed him by the mock-honorific nickname of '*feketevágó ur*,' or 'Sir Pig-killer.'[206]

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[205] Open Society Archives/Radio Free Europe Items Master Evaluation File (hereafter "OSA/RFE Items"), 1370/55, mf 52, p. 5.

[206] OSA/RFE 2743/55, mf 52, p. 3. The proper form of address in communist Hungary was the class-conscious '*elvtárs,*' or 'comrade,' instead of the bourgeois '*ur*' ('sir' or 'lord').

Although János's experience was almost certainly atypical, it illumines the broad range of criminal activity and unregulated exchange that was possible even during this most oppressive period of communist rule in Hungary.

Although the literature on collectivization in Hungary is extensive,[207] peasant resistance in Hungary has attracted much less attention; moreover, major contributions in the theoretical literature on peasant resistance—especially regarding everyday resistance, as is our concern herein—have not yet been applied to the Hungarian context. In the past, many scholars have taken the absence of any significant open resistance—in the form of riots, strikes, or other direct confrontation—to mean that there was no real opposition to communist rule in the countryside. This apparent quiescence of the Magyar peasantry is misleading. The subversion of the party-state's designs apparent in Chapter 1 was carried to its fullest realization in the villages, fields, and byways of communist Hungary. The result was a turbulent history of antagonism and resistance in which the peasantry was consistently able to work the system to minimal disadvantage.

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[207] See especially Martha Lampland, *The Object of Labor: Commodification in Socialist Hungary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), Iván Szelényi, *Socialist Entrepreneurs: Embourgeoisement in Rural Hungary* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), Marida Hollos and Bela C. Maday, eds., *New Hungarian Peasants: An East Central European Experience with Collectivization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), and Joseph D. Held, *The Modernization of Agriculture: Rural Transformation in Hungary, 1848-1975* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1980), Part VII. There are also a number of useful localized case studies, e.g. Ildiko Vasary, *Beyond the Plan: Social Change in A Hungarian Collectivized* Village (Boulder: Westview, 1988), Peter D. Bell, *Peasants in Socialist Transition: Life in a Collectivized Hungarian Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), C.M. Hann, *Tázlár: A Village in Hungary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) and Edit Fél and Tamás Hofer, *Proper Peasants: Traditional Life in a Hungarian Village* (New York: Wenner-Gren Foundation, 1969).

Tensions between nobles and peasants, between villagers of differing status, and between country and city antedate the inauguration of Communist rule by centuries. Prior to World War II, the lives of peasants in Hungary (as throughout much of Eastern Europe) were nasty, brutish, and short. Throughout this period, their perennial desire—for control of their own land and sovereignty over their labor—was achieved only by a minority, who were regarded with envy by the rest. Noble landlords were widely disliked by all segments of the rural populace. For most Magyar peasants, the most important event of the postwar period was the 1945-47 land reform: for literally the first time ever, many were granted the land they desired and the autonomy to farm it as they chose. We must view collectivization in this light: not merely as a new intrusion by the state, but as one that revoked the single most important act since 1848, when the serfs were freed. Although some peasants in Rákosi's Hungary benefited from the regime's policies, most regarded them as unwelcome intrusions and reacted accordingly. As a result, collectivization enjoyed only dubious success even at the height of the collectivization drive in early 1953.

Rural resistance to communist rule was founded in both historic practices and innovative responses to the intrusive party-state. Work-shirking, refusal to meet compulsory deliveries, and other forms of passive resistance confounded the regime's efforts to control agricultural production at every turn. Wood theft, a perennial form of peasant resistance, was practiced assiduously throughout the period. Pig-killing, previously a legal and well-established custom, was criminalized but also continued regardless. The irony apparent in both of these forms of resistance was that their products—illegally-procured wood and meat—found their way onto the black market. In

this regard the socialist scheme of centralizing the economy actually backfired. The regime's agricultural policy actually encouraged a hypercapitalist mindset among its rural subjects, and the products of these illicit activities became commodified as they had not been under the interwar capitalist regime.

The Hungarian Peasantry and Land Reform

The apparent calm of the Hungarian countryside before World War II masked significant animosities between peasants and landlords, between differing strata of peasants themselves, and between the country and the city. The prewar Hungarian countryside was dominated by *latifundia* or large estates. The abolition of serfdom in 1848 had done little to erode noble privilege on the ground: many former serfs became (landless) manorial workers, and many new landowners lacked the skills and capital to manage their land grants effectively. Indeed, the effects of the April Laws of 1848 were similar to those of the Enclosure Acts in Britain, as the landed aristocracy was able to appropriate many important former commonly-held areas (pastures and forests, ponds and streams) even as it retained its monopoly on milling and other key intermediary economic processes.[208] Noble hegemony in agricultural production was keenly resented by most peasants, especially those whose poverty left them no other option than manorial labor. These manorial workers surrendered their independence in return for one-year

[208] Lampland, *Object of Labor*, p. 104.

renewable contracts at the whim of the landlord.[209] However, these noble-peasant conflicts were only the tip of the iceberg of submerged village animosities.

The rural socioeconomic hierarchy in pre-Communist Hungary was clearly defined. It was contingent on how much land one owned, and to what extent one was master of one's own labor. The inequalities caused by the uneven distribution of these elements were drastic, and they tended to reproduce inequality in turn. The minimum area necessary to support a peasant family was between 5 and 10 holds (*katasztrális hold*, or kh); a farm of 20 holds or more generally indicated a well-off farmer, who would hire help at harvest time.[210] The rich peasant (*nagygazda*), who owned 20 kh or more, might receive up to 800 days of free labor annually from his neighbors in reciprocation for the loan of his horse and plow. This was the highest rung on the peasant social ladder, but only 7% of the peasant population enjoyed this relatively comfortable existence. Middle peasants, who owned from 5 to 20 holds and made up 23% of the peasantry, were generally able to scrape by from one winter to the next. The vast majority of Magyar peasants owned less than 5 holds; 46% owned no land at all.[211] Migrant workers and day laborers occupied the bottom rung on the rural social ladder, from which it was almost

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[209] As Lampland notes, "the phrase used to convey the act of contracting at the manor as a worker (*cselédnek ment* or *elment cselédnek*), an act undertaken most often in desperation, was analogous to the phrase used to describe a man moving to his wife's house at marriage." *Object of Labor*, p. 73

[210] The cadastral hold was the standard unit of land measurement in Hungary after 1851; it measured 1.42 acres, or .57 hectares. The minimum viable area for peasant subsistence is a matter of some debate among historians of Hungarian agriculture, and it varied by region. Bell (*Peasants in Socialist Transition*, p. 29), Lampland (*Object of Labor*, p. 38), and Romsics (p. 162) all concur on the 5-10 hold minimum. This minimum viable area was higher on the Alföld, where extensive cereal crops were the norm: Fél and Hofer suggest 15-20 holds per family in the village of Átány (*Proper Peasants*, p. 56), and Bodó suggests a minimum area of 10 hold for subsistence and 20 for any sort of capital accumulation for Nagyrév (p. 141). Held's estimate—that 14-52 holds were necessary to maintain "a relatively secure existence" (*The Modernization of Agriculture*, p. 300)—seems high. The Columbia researchers who compiled the CUHRP interviews held that 1 hectare would feed one person for one year, which is probably an adequate country-wide generalization. CUHRP, Subject Files: "Minutes of the Seminars," 17 March 1958, Box 29, p. 2.

impossible to ascend into solvency, much less respectability. This social stratification was partially ameliorated by "an elaborate network of reciprocal ties"—in which farm equipment, labor, and even spices and kitchen utensils were regularly traded, borrowed, and loaned between peasant families.[212] Manorial workers were excluded even from this scant support network, and were looked down upon by the "proper peasants" of the village. This rigid rural social hierarchy remained largely unaltered until after World War II.

Throughout the period 1848 to 1945, what few changes occurred in this basic structure were largely to the peasantry's disadvantage. Some members of the richer peasantry were able to cash in during the rash of land sales during the 1860s and 1870s; they also benefited in the period just after World War 1, as high agricultural prices coupled with runaway inflation eased the repayment of prewar loans. However, most peasants were unable to beat the system. Outright peasant rebellion was infrequent, although the late nineteenth century did witness a harvester's strike in 1897 followed the next year by widespread rioting and land seizure in the northeastern districts.[213] Due to their prohibitive cost, new farming technologies were only gradually adopted, and then generally only on manorial farms; the introduction of mechanical harvesters was actively discouraged by the Agricultural Ministry, which sought to keep as many peasants as possible employed on the land as a means of social control.[214] The Depression resulted

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[211] Romsics, p. 162.
[212] On this point see especially Fél and Hofer, *Proper Peasants*, pp. 174-176.
[213] Peter F. Sugar, Péter Hanák, and Tibor Frank, editors, *A History of Hungary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 271.
[214] Lampland, *Object of Labor*, p. 64.

in thousands of foreclosures and widespread poverty for those who remained in the countryside, exacerbating the preexisting tensions in the rural socioeconomic hierarchy.

The third axis of prewar antipathy was between city and country. In the rural mentality, Budapest (and to a lesser degree the other cities of Hungary) loomed large as the locus of both danger and temptation. The encroachment of capital, bureaucrats, and ideas from Budapest threatened both the peasant's economic stability and his traditional way of life. The tax structure, designed by and for the urban middle class and nobility, was profoundly regressive: by the interwar period, smallholders paid from three to five times as much per hold as their richer urban counterparts.[215] There was neither love lost nor trust wasted on the government itself: as Andrew Janos asserts, "Parliament was, at best, a distant place where educated people conducted their own business at the expense of the peasantry."[216] However, Budapest also beckoned with the promise of year-round employment at wage labor, modern commodities, education and electric light, cinemas and theaters, cafés and department stores, indoor plumbing, and all the other trappings of modernity. As modernity equaled debauchery in the peasant mentality, Budapest's threat was also couched in moral terms, as demonstrated by the response of the family of Gyula Illyés (1902-1983) when his father quit his job and started planning a move to Budapest:

[215] Bodó, *Tiszazug*, p. 139.
[216] Janos, *Politics of Backwardness*, p. 241.

> My father's relatives received his plans with astonishment; they were scared and horrified of Budapest, which to them was a sink of iniquity. They would much rather have borne the shame of my father sinking to the level of a swineherd at home than his becoming a factory worker. They would sooner have agreed to his moving to America than Újpest. And they were quite right: one could return from America, but never from Újpest."[217]

Both destinations were popular among the agrarian poor, at least until the end of World War I. The population of Budapest tripled between 1869 and 1913; in the same period more than 1.5 million people emigrated from (Greater) Hungary to the United States.[218] After World War I, American immigration was drastically curtailed and Budapest became the primary destination for peasants fleeing the countryside. By 1941, its population had reached 1.165 million, primarily via interior migration rather than natural increase.[219] However, those that fled the countryside for the USA or Budapest were the exceptions to the norm.

Those who remained on the land continued as before. The interwar period saw the continued impoverishment of the peasantry, fuelling the popular conception of Hungary as "the land of three million beggars."[220] Although there was a half-hearted attempt at land reform in 1920, it accomplished very little. In 1935, just over 72% of the 1,634,407 landowners in Hungary still owned 5 holds or less; the richest 1070 landowners controlled 29% of the land, averaging 4,494 kh apiece. The wealthiest noble

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[217] Gyula Illyés (G.F. Cushing, translator), *People of the Puszta* (Budapest: Corvina, 1967), pp. 280-281.
[218] Note that this number is for the entire eastern half of the Austro-Hungarian empire; many of these emigrants were Slovaks and Ruthenians (ethnic Ukrainians) from poverty-stricken farming regions, whose rate of return—over 40% for the period before WWI—was also higher than ethnic Magyar emigrants. Tibor Frank, *Ethnicity, Propaganda, Myth-making: Studies on Hungarian Connections to Britain and America* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1999), pp. 79, 85.
[219] András Gerő and János Poór, editors, *Budapest: A History from its Beginnings to 1998* (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 1997), pp. 104, 140, 142;

families controlled 50,000 kh or more; the largest single landholder was the Catholic Church, which held 1.2 million kh (685,000 hectares).[221] As throughout Central Europe, the popular demand in Hungary for drastic land reform grew steadily throughout this period. By World War II, widespread poverty, resentment of the nobility, and a rigid social hierarchy all provided a widespread impetus for change—and also rural animosities the Communist Party might be able to play upon to its advantage.

Although World War II left the Hungarian countryside in ruins, it also swept away the old governing elite and nobility. The postwar coalition government began planning a major land reform even before Hungary was entirely out of the war. It was carried out in a haphazard manner between 1945 and 1947. The vast landholdings of the church and nobility were the primary targets of redistribution; the agrarian poor, the primary beneficiaries. Over one third of the total area of Hungary (5.6 million holds) was redistributed; fully 93% of the individuals receiving land were previously landowners of 5 holds or less. However, the equitability of the land reform on paper was marred by its practice on the ground. The availability of expropriated land varied by region, and not every person who deserved land under the new law received his allotment.

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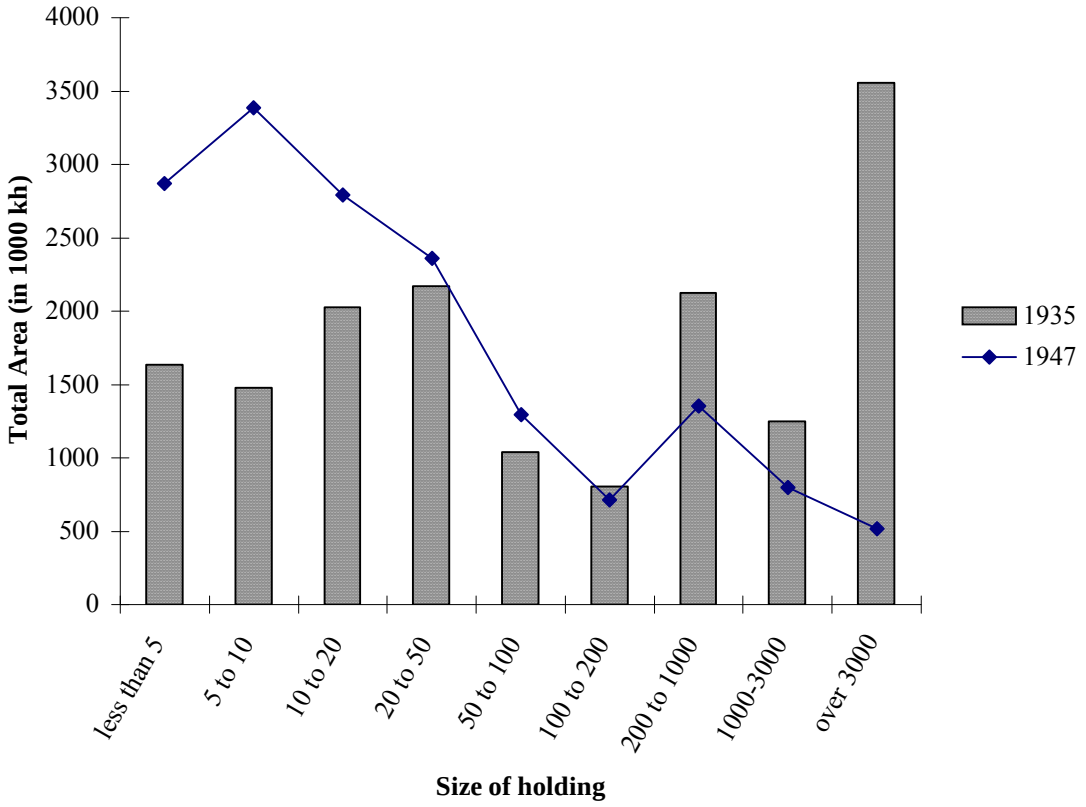
[220] The term was coined by the right-wing populist Oláh György in the 1920s.

[221] Lampland, *Object of Labor*, p. 40. The largest single owners were the Eszterhazy family, who controlled 207,000 kh (294,000 acres); the Habsburg family possessions amounted to almost 70,400 kh (100,000 acres), and various other noble families (e.g., Festetics, Pallavicini) were all well above the 50,000 kh mark. Held, *Modernization of Agriculture*, pp. 234-235.

Chart 2.1 Effects of 1945-1947 Land Reform on Distribution of Farmland[222]



Many returning prisoners-of-war and Hungarian refugees from neighboring countries were excluded, as were Roma.[223] The distribution of property at the local level was heavily determined by kinship and other extralegal ties, leading to charges of nepotism and bribery. Despite all these shortcomings, the land reform was a largely-successful exercise in leveling the rural social hierarchy—while it lasted.

Although individual farming is antithetical to socialism in its Soviet variant, the Party supported land reform at this time. Much like their counterparts throughout Eastern Europe, communist agitators went along with the popular demand for land redistribution

[222] from Romsics, p. 228.

in hopes of gaining rural support.[224] This pragmatic strategy for Eastern Europe was based not only on the immediate postwar political context of coalition government but also on the historical lesson learned during the Russian Civil War (1918-1922). At that time, the Bolsheviks had encouraged peasants to seize noble lands in order to gain their support against the White Armies. This had proven a key measure in their eventual victory, and collectivization had been delayed for almost a decade.[225] Hungary also offered a striking example of how not to reform agricultural production: In 1919, Béla Kun had made the mistake of insisting on immediate collectivization, thereby losing the support of the peasants of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Republic.[226] His postwar counterparts throughout Eastern Europe had learned their lesson, and bided their time. However, as Joseph Held notes, by supporting land reform the party "destroyed much of its own base of support among the agrarian poor; by giving them land, they were turned into champions of private ownership."[227] This hands-off policy lasted only as long as it took the Party to seize control. The collectivization drive began in earnest on 20 August 1948.

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[223] Lampland, *Object of Labor*, pp. 119, 121.
[224] Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe*, p. 20.
[225] Ronald Suny, *The Soviet Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 88-93.
[226] Berend, *Decades of Crisis*, p. 128.
[227] Held, *Modernization of Agriculture*, p. 368.

Collectivization and Rural Crime

The collectivization of agriculture was one of the key doctrines of communist rule. Large agricultural enterprises owned and controlled by the state promised control over both agricultural production and the rural population, and the surplus labor freed up by the mechanization of agriculture could then be channeled into the ranks of the urban proletariat. Although Marx had articulated this need for agricultural "industrial armies" and "the combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries" in his *Communist Manifesto* in 1848, the precise methods of this transposition of socialist organization from industry to agriculture had remained inchoate until the late 1920s. The Soviet example is instructive. After a severe grain shortage in late 1927, the USSR resorted to forcible requisitioning of grain from its peasantry; then, in November 1929, the decision was made to collectivize the entire country into large, rationalized, and legible agricultural units. Flying squads of activists and police descended on the villages; millions of peasants lost their land and were deported to Siberia and Central Asia; many millions more died in the man-made famine that followed, especially in Ukraine. Collectivization in Hungary and throughout Eastern Europe after World War II was carried out with the same strong-arm tactics: it was "a virtual civil war between state and peasantry…in which the front was the village and the shock troops an embattled and unpopular minority of local officials and peasant activists who had gone over to the other side."[228] From 1948 to mid-1953, and again from early 1955 to mid-1956, the primary goal of the communist regime in the countryside was to coerce Hungarian peasants off their private

[228] Lynn Viola, *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin*, pp. 235, 114.

farms and into state and collective farms (*termelőszövetkezeti csoportok*, or *tszcs-k*).[229] Its success was equivocal.

Collectivization was not entirely unpopular. The collective farm promised regular employment year-round, bonuses for exceeding production quotas, and even sign-on bonuses. Even after the land reform, 1.4 million peasants and their families remained on untenable holdings of 5 holds or less. Former manorial workers, accustomed as they were to niche roles in large-scale manorial agricultural production, lacked the skills and knowledge to successfully run a small farm. They also experienced difficulty integrating into the peasant hierarchy. For them, collectivization was a return to predictable incomes and stability.[230] For poor peasants, it potentially offered a new route of escape from their perennially-destitute status. Over and above the peasantry's immediate economic concerns, the rhetoric of egalitarian, communal activity doubtless appealed to many idealists; the chance to settle old scores doubtless appealed to many opportunists. However, for most peasants—for whom the desire to own their own land and control their own labor was a central element of their identity—joining the *tszcs* was an abhorrent, last-ditch decision. To many, collectivization must have seemed a particularly tragic farcical reenactment of a prior tragedy: being forced into unfree labor on a

[229] There were three gradations of collective organization in Hungary, ranging from sharing only tools to the complete assimilation of one's goods and land into the communal pool; see Lampland, *Object of Labor,* pp. 145, 188, for a more detailed explanation of these differences. As Romsics notes (p. 278), both state and collective farms were directly subordinate to the National Planning Office, and the distinctions between these categories are therefore largely formal for our purposes.
[230] Bell, *Peasants in Socialist Transition*, pp. 101-106, Lampland, *Object of Labor*, pp. 149-150.

manorial farm different only in name.[231] This, coupled with the historic animosity towards Budapest—one that Communist propaganda did little to assuage—made most peasants wary of joining the *tszcs*.

The state adopted a number of strategies to coerce them into the collectives. Delivery quotas, reestablished in 1946 on a progressive scale, required richer peasants to yield a much greater percentage of their produce to the state than their poorer neighbors.[232] Taxes on private farms were also revised drastically upwards, trebling between 1949 and 1953.[233] The communist regime imported the concept of the "kulak" (*kulák* in Hungarian), or the rich peasant who exploits his poorer compatriots, from its Soviet context relatively unchanged.[234] In an effort to bring the poor peasantry over to the side of the Party, regime propaganda demonized kulaks as rentiers, parasites, and holdovers from the bourgeois past. Kulaks were singled out by legal administration for persecution, expropriation, and internment. In Hungary, any peasant who owned more than 25 holds (14.25 hectares) of land fell into this category. However, as in the USSR, this standard was applied unfairly: relatives of party members and other locals with good connections often found themselves in much less danger of being labeled a kulak than

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[231] "As peasants were forced to join the kolkhozes in Hungary they were allowed to keep one hold, slightly more than one acre, of land under family cultivation. This was exactly the amount of land to which manorial laborers on the large estates before word War II were entitled. There were many other parallels. … [there were] several kolkhozes which occupied exactly the land of the former estate. … This historical continuity did not escape the attention of former villagers either. … one of our respondents told us about his experiences in the kolkhoz: "We are manorial laborers on extended service" ("*Tovább szolgálo cselédek vagyunk*."). He knew what he was talking about. Before the war, as a young man, he had been the carriage driver for local landlords … later, he drove wagons for the kolkhoz." Szelényi, *Socialist Entrepreneurs*, p. 21. Lampland encountered a slightly different form of the aphorism, "*Tovább szegödö cseléd*" or "rehired manorial worker," during her fieldwork in Sárosd (*Object of Labor*, p. 150).

[232] On this point see Lampland, *Object of Labor*, pp. 141-144.

[233] Romsics, p. 277.

[234] See Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power: A Study of Collectivization* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1975), pp. 490-491.

their less-favored neighbors, regardless of the size of their holdings. Over 140,000 holds of rented land were seized outright from kulaks in September 1948; the "kulak list" included some 71,600 families altogether.[235] When all else failed, ÁVH troops and *népnevelők* would descend on the villages and bully peasants into signing over their property, tools, livestock and labor to the newly-established collective farm.

This inchoate "virtual civil war" between the state and the peasantry took concrete form in the courtroom. Open, public opposition—in the form of strikes, riots, or demonstrations—was futile and foolhardy, and very few cases of this type occurred throughout this period. Arson was a different story. Burning something to the ground—a freshly-harvested crop on collective land, an unguarded harvester or other piece of farm machinery, or even the house of a particularly-disliked official—could be done covertly at night. It was a safer means of attacking to the regime, and Magyar peasants practiced it assiduously. Nationwide, 12,649 arson cases were investigated in the period 1951 to 1955. At the peak of repression in 1952, there were 4539 arson incidents investigated, or an average of roughly twelve fires per day.[236] Although the assault of administration and party officials was one crime that would invite close investigation by the regime, it was still not uncommon. Increased attacks on collections officers and other agents of the state were probably the primary reason for the creation of a new category of crimes, "assaults on agents of the state," in 1952; at this time, crimes of this type averaged over seven per day.[237] Indeed, by the end of the year there was "a critical shortage" of collections officers, as they stole away from their positions in the local administration to less

[235] Swain, p. 42; Balogh, ed., *Nehéz Esztendők Krónikája*, p. 30.
[236] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (F) / 70 ő.e., p. 314a.

dangerous occupations.[238] However, arson and assault both involved a fair amount of risk. Avoiding collective labor, cheating on one's deliveries to the state, and other forms of "passive" resistance were much more viable everyday options.

High-profile crimes like murder or arson aside, the history of rural crime in communist Hungary largely boils down to the state's attempts to extract everything possible from the peasants, and the peasants trying to yield as little as possible. During the period 1948 to 1950 alone, over 400,000 peasants were put on trial, the majority of them for crimes against the public supply.[239] The 1951 countrywide report on the trials connected with the summer and autumn compulsory delivery campaigns clearly detailed the various legal troubles that plagued Magyar peasants. Almost half of all trials were for the failure to deliver pork, chickens, or eggs. Another quarter was for failing to participate in collective harvesting or sowing. Failing to deliver crop quotas, hoarding grain, and illegal trading made up the rest of these crimes.[240] Kulaks were disproportionately represented on this list, accounting for just over half of all these crimes. They also drew stiffer sentences. Of the twenty kulaks tried by the Kaposvar district court in the autumn of 1950 for not delivering their full quotas, each drew a 1-2 year sentence.[241] One Csongrad kulak found guilty of attempting to hide 3 quintals of grain was sentenced to 3 months in prison and a 1000-forint fine, a sentence the assessor found "too lenient."[242] Another kulak had failed to bring his tractor to harvest on time.

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[237] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (F) / 70 ő.e., p. 314a.
[238] Rév, "The Advantages of Being Atomized," p. 343.
[239] Révai, editor, *Törvénytelen Szocializmus*, p. 85.
[240] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) / 14 ő.e., p. 228.
[241] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) / 2 ő.e., p. 40.
[242] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) / 8 ő.e., p. 68.

He was sentenced to "only" 3 months in prison, a 2000-forint fine, and 5 years exclusion from public affairs.[243] (In comparison, S.H., an agronomist guilty of the same crime, got off with only a 1000-forint fine.[244]) As a rule, sentences for working peasants were much lower.

This war waged on the peasantry by the regime suffered from the law of diminishing returns. It soon became apparent that if convictions continued at their current pace, it would negatively affect the fulfillment of the plan. An April 1951 proposal from the Ministry of Justice to the MDP Central Committee suggested the suspension of all sentences under one year for all working peasants who had joined a collective farm or worked at a machine-station; the amnesty would extend even to (non-collective) day-laborers, as long as their crimes were of a non-political nature.[245] (The archives do not contain a response to this proposal, and there is no record of it being put into effect.) As noted in Chapter 1, matters seem to have come to a head in 1952, when regime monitors noted the first signs of mass rural resistance.

Throughout the entire stalinist period, the "weapons of the weak" utilized by Magyar peasants severely hampered the success of the collectivization drive. By June of 1953, 5,224 collective farms and cooperatives had been created in Hungary, employing 376,000 persons and covering 1.62 million hectares, or only about 30% of the total sown area in Hungary.[246] The total area farmed actually *decreased* throughout the period,

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[243] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) / 8 ő.e., p. 77a. One quintal equals 100 kilograms.
[244] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) / 49 ő.e., p. 311.
[245] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iű) / 5 ő.e., p. 286. Crimes specifically defined as 'political' by this author included weapons-hoarding and illegal border-crossing.
[246] By comparison, collectivization in the USSR began in earnest in 1929; by 1932, 60% of the arable land was collectivized, and the rest shortly thereafter. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village After Collectivization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 62.

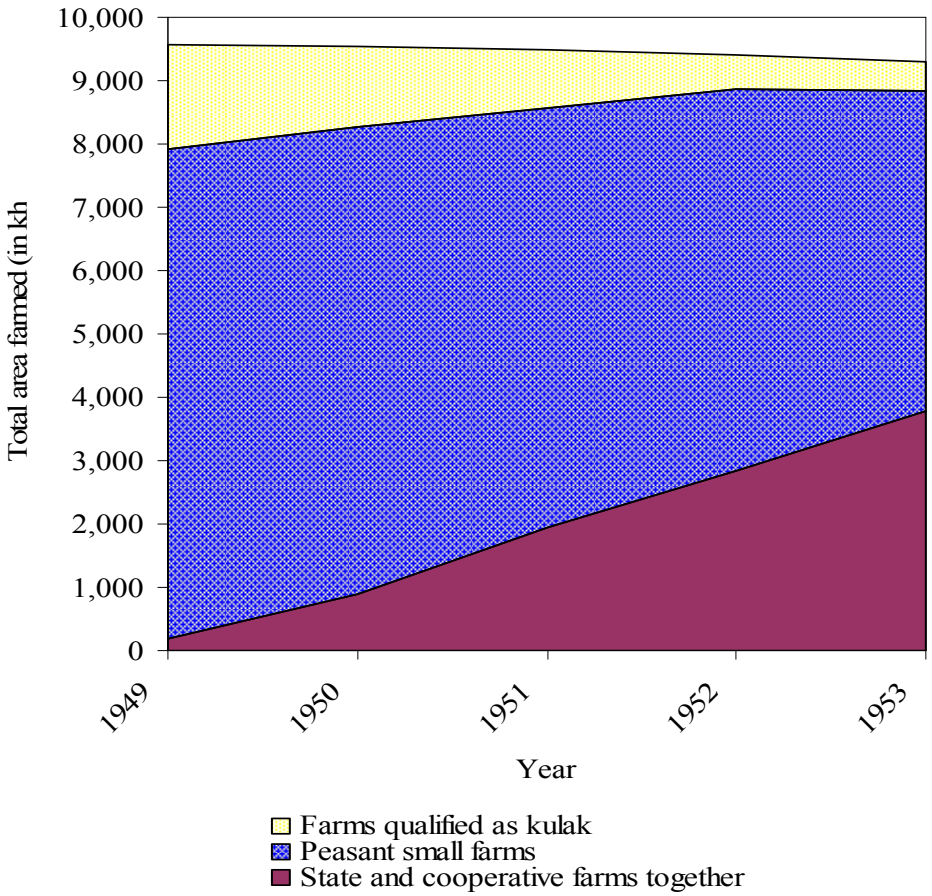
falling from a prewar high of 5.47 million hectares in 1938 to 5.36 million hectares in 1953, and 5.19 million hectares in 1956. Likewise, the total agricultural output stagnated throughout the 1950s, surpassing the 1938 standard only twice, in 1951 and 1955. By 1952, Hungary—historically one of the major exporters of wheat on the continent—was forced to import wheat, a situation that did not change until the 1970s.[247] With the advent of the reform-oriented New Course in 1953, peasants deserted the collectives in droves. 278,000 deserted in the first four months. Although Rákosi and the other hardliners enjoyed some success in reversing that trend after their return to power in 1955, 1956 again witnessed widespread collective dissolution and abandonment. Collectivization was not finally completed until well after the revolution, in 1962.[248] In short, even on paper collectivization was less than successful.

On the ground it was chaos. A 1951 report from Csongrad county discussed the collectivization drive at some length. According to the report, officials were incompetent and interdepartmental cooperation was infrequent.

> The county council fails to adequately supervise the manner in which the district and county committees prepare for the grain deliveries. This is due to the fact that every one of the county committee secretaries is unfamiliar with one or another important aspect of the proper collection procedure.

[247] Romsics, pp.277-279, Swain, p. 76. Note, however, that both 1950 and 1952 were drought years.
[248] Romsics, p. 330.

Chart 2.2 Distribution of Farm Land, 1949-1953



The same report found that many work competitions and other collective farm activities existed "*csak papiron*"—only on paper.[249] Reports from practically every county in Hungary joined this chorus with a similar refrain. Party membership in the countryside was quite low: at one state farm, only 36 of its members were also members of the party—and of them, only 13 worked in the field and not the administrative office.[250] Poor pay contributed to a high attrition rate among *tszcs* workers: in Mezőtur, three

peasants who had signed on as skilled workers promptly left when they found out that their pay came out to only 450 forints per month. The man who had organized the collective farm in the first place was among them.[251] Poor organization and high turnover rates severely hampered the success of the collectivization drive.

The rural administration was also particularly vulnerable to the types of interstitial machinations described in Chapter 1. County-level party officials and collective farm managers found themselves caught between Budapest's unrealistic expectations and the volatile and difficult local conditions in which they had to operate. The latter often prevailed. One 1956 émigré, a mechanical engineer at a tractor station near Pecs, recalled that "Cheating was commonplace at the tractor station, when it came to fulfilling the prescribed norms." The regular machinery inspections were regularly foiled by the members of different tractor stations working together:

> Inspectors used to check on the condition of the machinery—[sometimes] some of the machines were not repaired so, for the station to protect itself, these faulty machines were hidden and another station was contacted for the purpose of borrowing repaired machines. That's how the production of the tractor machine station was put in a favorable light. Repaired machines used to be transferred from tractor station to tractor station, preceding the committee of inspectors.[252]

Another tractor-station administrator, this one an agronomist from the Harkany region, recounted the exact same book-keeping legerdemain at his workplace:

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[249] MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 40 ő.e., pp. 2, 3, 42.
[250] MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 423 ő.e., p. 102.
[251] MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 40 ő.e., p. 8.
[252] CUHRP Interview 402, Box 13, pp. 28-29.

> [F]or the periodic inspections of equipment frequently the same machinery was borrowed from station to station, the equipment was then returned after the inspection.… Tractor stations all had "black" tractors. These were tractors officially turned in as decrepit, useless equipment but actually kept while some junk was handed in to the junkyard.

This latter source also echoed the relatively lax enforcement of the administration's will: "Peasants disregarded work contests, paid their taxes late, evaded compulsory jobs and contributions," and theft from the fields was commonplace.[253] The lack of law enforcement personnel made laying down the law much more difficult in the countryside. Villages of 3000 or fewer souls had no regular police force and were only visited on a weekly basis by officers from neighboring larger towns, while towns of up to 15,000 had only one or two policemen.[254] The ÁVH was also spread thin in the countryside.[255] In many villages and smaller towns, the party-state's local representatives consisted of only a handful of functionaries and activists. Over and above whatever sympathies local administrators might have had for their local subjects, they were often simply unable to enforce the regime's program. Thus, as Rév states,

> Those [party functionaries] who really cooperated with the peasantry had the best chances. They allowed the peasants to sell their cows on the black market and reported the sudden loss of animals in the village; helped the peasants falsify their birth certificates so that the population suddenly grew old, and those above 65 years of age could qualify for quota reductions; shut their eyes when the peasants organized pseudocooperatives; tolerated the division of land among family members; contributed to hiding animals in the woods or grain under the ground. …

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[253] CUHRP Interview 406, Box 13, pp. 36-37, 49, 28.
[254] See, e.g., OSA/RFE Items 8670/53, mf 27, OSA/RFE Items 19/54, mf 32, and OSA/RFE Items 8851/54, mf 44.
[255] Parádi,, editor, *A Magyar Rendvédelem Története*, p. 144.

> For the members of the apparatus to survive, the survival methods of the producers were indispensable.[256]

In short, it was the vested interest of everyone involved—both the members of the administration and the peasants it supposedly controlled—to resort to subterfuge. These tendencies that pervaded the entire system, as we have seen in Chapter 1, were especially prevalent in rural areas. The intricate webs of illegal activity, workplace theft, and the black market pervaded the countryside, as is clearly apparent in János S.'s experience.

János's biography recapitulates both the stasis of the interwar period and the tumultuous upheavals that followed.[257] He was born in 1928, and grew up in the small town his family had lived in for two hundred years. Although most of his family remained on the land, two of them tried their luck in the USA: his father worked there from 1908 until the outbreak of World War I, and his aunt still lived there in the 1950s. His father fought in World War I and then entered business as a livestock buyer and dealer in other commodities. János was just young enough to avoid the draft in World War II, and trained as a butcher's apprentice from 1946 to 1949. He then drifted to Budapest, where he worked a stint in the Mátyás Rákosi ironworks in Csepel. János returned to his hometown in 1951, when he married and began to dabble in the black market. During this time one of his cousins was arrested for black-marketeering, and one of his uncles, labeled a kulak despite his legal status as a working peasant (he owned only 20 holds), was arrested for not fulfilling his delivery quota. János's first run-in with the

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[256] Rév, "The Advantages of Being Atomized," p. 339.

[257] The following is a summary of the copious biographical data collected by his RFE interviewer in OSA/RFE Items 1370/55, mf 50. János was interviewed on three separate occasions between March and May of 1955.

state apparatus also occurred in that year, as the local party officials seized half of the plot of land left him by his aunt in America. He swiftly sold off the other half before it was expropriated as well. To avoid the draft, and possibly the unfriendly attention of the local authorities, he went to work in the mines in Miskolc. He ended up serving a few months in an ÁVH border unit anyway, but managed to get himself dismissed as unfit for service shortly after the advent of the New Course.[258] On returning to his small town in mid-1953, János was finally able to devote himself to the profitable, and entirely illegal, trade in wood and meat.

Wood Theft and Pig-killing

Both wood theft and pig-killing had significant but disparate historical precedents. All throughout Europe, and well into the nineteenth century, the right to harvest wood and other forest resources was a perennial source of conflict between peasants and their landlords. Lords and other landholders sought to arrogate to themselves all uses of wooded areas, while peasants appealed to hereditary or customary forest usage rights to harvest wood and hunt game. In England, legal clashes over the right to gather wood and hunt in the forests date back at least to the thirteenth century. By the mid-nineteenth century, custom-based peasant claims on common forest resources had been usurped by enclosure and capital. The pattern evident here is common throughout Europe: against the courts, which regularly ruled in favor of the landholder, "the peasantry and the poor employed stealth, a knowledge of every bush and by-way, and the force of numbers."

[258] OSA/RFE Items 1370/55, mf 50, pp. 5-7.

Between the two extremes of the rural hierarchy, the "forest-keepers and under-keepers, who had long supplemented their petty salaries with perquisites, made inroads into the venison, sold off the brushwood and furze, [and] made private arrangements with inn-keepers and pastry-cooks, butchers and tanners."[259] Similarly, German princes matched their innovations in silviculture with an increasingly ruthless prosecution of the peasants who infringed on their forest resources. By 1836, roughly 70% of the 207,000 cases brought before Prussian courts were for wood theft and other forest-related offenses; in 1842, one in every *four* inhabitants of Baden was convicted of wood theft.[260] This tension between hereditary, common-usage rights and exclusive landholder forest use was apparent in Hungary as well.

Maria Theresa granted her Magyar peasants forest-use rights in the Urbarial Patent of 1767, and even briefly enforced this legal right over the objections of the Hungarian nobles.[261] However, this period of support lasted only slightly longer than the reformist tendencies of Maria Theresa and her son Joseph II. By the early nineteenth century, the legal battle over enclosure and forest use had shifted back in the nobles' favor. During the 1848-49 revolution, peasants attempted to reassert these traditional prerogatives; like the Habsburgs, the revolutionary government responded with

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[259] E.P. Thomspon, *Customs in Common* (New York: The New Press, 1993), pp. 103, 104.

[260] The legal struggle over forest resources was actually one of the major early influences on Karl Marx's intellectual development. Peter Linebaugh, "Karl Marx, the Theft of Wood, and Working-Class Composition: A Contribution to the Current Debate," *Crime and Social Justice* (Fall-Winter 1976) pp. 5-16, p. 13.

[261] Initially the current attorneys-general were tasked with carrying out the Patent. As they were themselves members of the rural nobility and not predisposed to enforce laws that encroached on their privileges, Maria Theresa was eventually forced to appoint royal commissioners in order to enforce the Patent. Sugar, et. al., editors, *A History of* Hungary, p. 153.

propaganda, arrests, and when those failed, executions.[262] By the interwar period, the state had entered the lists as a major controller of forest resources; those forested areas not already absorbed by the Horthy state were taken over by the coalition government during the land reform of 1945-47. Under the communist regime, Hungarian forests fell under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of State Farms and Forests (*Allami Gazdaságok és Erdők Miniszterium*, or AGEM). Wood harvesting was restricted and carefully monitored, and forest wardens prowled the forests in pursuit of wood thieves and poachers. According to regime propaganda, these measures were effective deterrents for this perennial mode of peasant resistance.

The accounts of forest-related crime in *Magyar Rendőr* suggest that the forests were closely policed. One 1949 photographic essay went into some detail about how one wood thief was tracked down. Upon discovering trees missing, the forest warden contacted a police patrol. The police sleuthed around the cut area, eventually finding the tracks of a loaded cart pulled by two horses. Combined with the fact that the type of wood stolen was probably intended for use in smoking tobacco rather than firewood, the patrol set out to find a farm with both a two-horse cart and a tobacco-smoking shed. The second house they searched—owned by one I. B., a kulak who owned 30 holds—fit both criteria, and the discovery of some of the stolen wood there confirmed his guilt. Under interrogation, I.B. revealed that he had stolen the wood in conjunction with his son-in-law, an ex-gendarme. Both culprits went to jail and the remaining wood was returned to

[262] Istvan Deak, *The Lawful Revolution: Louis Kossuth and the Hungarians, 1848-49* (London: Phoenix Press, 2001), pp. 50, 116-117.

the forestry department.[263] A 1952 case involved two kulaks who were apprehended in the act of cutting wood: although they had forest-clearing permits, further investigation of their farm revealed five wagonloads' worth of illegally-cut wood.[264] A poaching story, also from 1949, reveals the same predictable trope: the villain is swiftly brought to justice, competent and reliable forest wardens are once more the heroes of the day.[265] Throughout, the official line on forest resource-related crimes repeatedly drove home these two key themes: that the usual suspects and most likely culprits were almost invariably kulaks, and that AGEM officials, the police, and the courts interacted swiftly and efficiently in dispensing justice to these antisocial elements.

The archives reveal almost the exact opposite. A report issued after a 1952 interior survey of AGEM's operations lamented the widespread corruption, wage-fraud, glossing-over of mistakes, and other deviations that ran rampant among the forest ministry workers. As in the collective farms, party organization in the county- and district-level offices was a mess. In many, the local apparatus was entirely uninvolved in AGEM affairs; some regional offices had no party organization at all; even of those that did, many failed to even respond to the survey. It closed with a recommendation to monitor ministry activities on at least a quarterly basis.[266] A later report, from February 1956, repeats this refrain: party organization and competence in the county-level offices still varied wildly. It also revealed that the majority of forestry workers knew very little about forestry science, or forests in general. The latter report ends with a suggestion for

[263] "Fát lopott a kulák," *Magyar Rendőr*, 1 October 1949.
[264] "Az erdőirtó kulak," *Magyar Rendőr*, 17 May 1952.
[265] "Az orvvadasz," *Magyar Rendőr*, 15 December 1949.
[266] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 / 331 ő.e, p. 2.

monthly evaluations.[267] Albeit primarily a rural phenomenon, it appears that wood-stealing was also a matter of concern to the urban authorities as well. The first article to draw attention to urban wood theft (from the wooded areas in and around Budapest) ran in November 1951.[268] The autumn 1954 Budapest police report called attention to wood theft, and called for closer coordination with the forestry department as well as joint actions by the district investigative forces and the ÁVH.[269] Although most stolen wood was probably kept for personal use, some of it found its way onto the rural black market.

János S. became involved in the illicit wood trade. The winter of 1953-54 was brutally cold; there was no place in his village to buy wood legally, and even when someone could make the trip to the state store in nearby K. there was often no wood available for purchase. János started scheming well in advance of the 1954-55 winter.

> At the start of September 1954, I happened to make the acquaintance of a young forester at the P. state forest. … The young forester seemed like quite a regular guy [*nagyon rendes embernek látszott*], so I broached the topic to him. First I asked him if he wouldn't like to make a little extra money. The young forester jumped at the opportunity, and went on to tell me that he already sold many people wood from the state forest. He was only concerned that nobody learn his name. The deal was settled, and I bought 15 quintals [1.5 tons] of wood from him for 600 forints, which my uncle brought home that very night.

As János tells it, this would have been a one-time deal. However, as the winter progressed his friends and acquaintances started approaching him for the scarce commodity—and offering cash up front. He contacted the young forester once more, and

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[267] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 / 331 ő.e, pp. 3, 5.
[268] "Fatolvajok," *Magyar Rendőr*, 24 November 1951.
[269] BFL XXXV. 95. e / 107 ő.e., "Intézkedési terv," p. 3.

the latter was amenable to further dealings. A mutually-beneficial illicit trade in firewood commenced. The young forester harvested 1.5 tons of wood at a time, for which he received 500 forints per load. János's uncle—who had access to a truck, probably via a state job—would then transport the wood to its destination, for which he would receive 100 forints. János retailed each load at 800 forints, thus making 200 forints profit per trip. They sold ten truckloads, or 15 tons, of wood in this manner over the course of the next few months.[270] In this case at least, wood theft was carried out on a massive scale, with relative impunity, and with the collusion of a member of the organization tasked to patrol precisely this type of deviant behavior.

Thus, rather than extirpating this perennial mode of peasant resistance, the centralized command economy inadvertently encouraged and enabled it. Prior to communist rule, peasants stole wood primarily for their own use, and generally only as much as they could carry. AGEM inadvertently generated the diathesis for illicit behavior on the part of its underpaid employees. The scarcity of firewood generated demand. All that was required was an entrepreneurial middleman to connect the supplier with his potential customers. János filled this role, and made a healthy profit thereby—but only reluctantly, according to him. His reluctance is understandable, as dealing in wood was a much higher-profile crime, and nowhere near as lucrative, as his main source of income: *feketevágás*, or illegal pig-killing.

[270] OSA/RFE Items 3534/55, mf 53, pp. 2-3. János did not reveal the name of his source to his RFE interviewer either.

Illegal slaughter might seem an odd practice to interrogate for signs of peasant resistance; however, the pig occupies a central position in the cultural and culinary world of the Magyar peasant. Prior to communist rule, the annual pig-killing (*disznóölés*) was a major event, "at least as important as Christmas,"[271] in the cultural life of Magyar peasants. Although the custom doubtless has earlier antecedents, its widespread observance can be reliably dated back to the start of the twentieth century. One of the many attendant effects of economic growth in the late Austro-Hungarian Empire was that native Hungarian pig breeds were supplanted by the more fertile and fatty Serbian *Mangalica* strain; after the turn of the century, pig husbandry spread rapidly throughout the Hungarian countryside.[272] By the late 1930s, there were 3.1 million pigs in Hungary against 1.8 million cattle.[273] Pigs make good economic sense, as are relatively easy to raise and their feed-to-yield ratio is significantly higher than that of any other common farm animal. [274] One full-grown (160-180 kg) pig supplied enough pork, bacon, and lard to last a family of four all year, while wealthier families might slaughter four or five pigs per year.

The actual slaughter of the pig was a festive event. After the pig's throat was cut, the rest of the day was spent in rendering the carcass. This communal process was characterized by a gendered division of labor: while the men butchered the pig, the women washed the intestines for use as sausage casings, did the rest of the preparation

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[271] Fél and Hofer, p. 160.

[272] The meatier, but also more labor-intensive, Yorkshire strain was slow to catch on in Hungary, accounting for only about 15% of the national stock in 1911. Romsics, p. 22.

[273] In this regard Hungary is unique: every other Central European country had many more cows than pigs in the interwar years. M.C. Kaser and E.A. Radice, *The Economic History of Eastern Europe 1919-1975* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), Volume 1, p. 200.

for preserving the meat by smoking and salting, and cooked all day. In addition to providing a year's supply of meat, the *disznóölés* was also an occasion for a feast, generally numbering twelve or more. Although peasant families would usually restrict the guest list to family members (including some in-laws), they would also send a 'taste' of the meat around to their neighbors, seizing the opportunity to strengthen non-kinship bonds—and catch up on gossip—in the process.[275] The significance of pig-killing in the cultural world of the Magyar peasantry is indicated by its regular occurrence in the popular lexicon: as a signifier of poverty—"one who does not stick a pig is a real pauper"—and as a symbolic shorthand for familial closeness, as a man who had successfully inveigled his siblings out of their inheritance might find that "he has the land, but can hardly find anyone to stick the pig."[276] Pig-killing was, thus, a major element of Magyar peasant life. Any attempt to alter its practice was certain to run afoul of entrenched custom.

Meat was even scarcer than other commodities in communist Hungary.[277] World War II had seriously depleted the national livestock reserves, and collectivization only exacerbated this problem. An abundance of swine, like any conspicuous display of wealth, rendered the owner more likely to be labeled a kulak. Many peasants would also

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[274] On this point see Richard A. Lobban, Jr., "Pigs and their Prohibition," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (February, 1994), pp. 57-75, p. 65.

[275] Fél and Hofer, *Proper Peasants*, pp. 119, 206. Bell notes that after one 1951 pig-killing the family distributed 'tastes' to twenty-three other families. p. 226.

[276] Fél and Hofer, *Proper Peasants*, pp. 257, 276. On this point see also Bell, *Peasants in Socialist Transition*, p. 76, and Lampland, "Pigs, Party Secretaries, and Private Live in Communist Hungary," *American Ethnologist* Volume 18, Number 3 (August 1991), pp. 459-479.

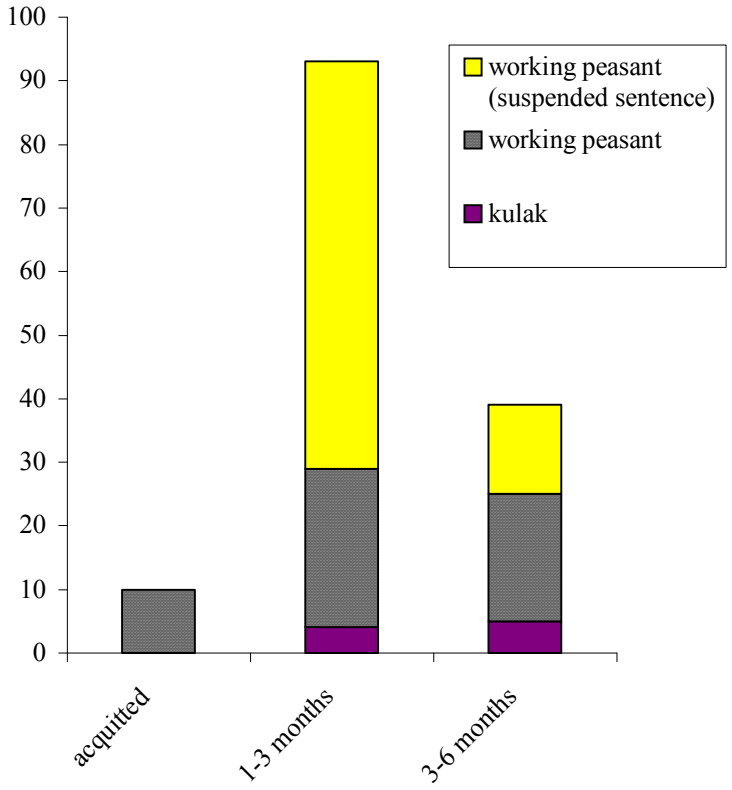
choose to slaughter their animals before joining the collective farm, choosing a short-term binge—and, as we shall see, the chance to make a significant profit, if distributed wisely—over the long-term near-certainty that the state would take away their animals. In an effort to head off the wholesale slaughter of livestock the regime established a bureau, the National Office for Pork and Lard Distribution, in order to monitor meat and lard collection.[278] Peasants desiring to slaughter their livestock were required to receive permission from the local authorities to do so, and then turn over the majority of the meat and lard to the state. To require this of the Magyar peasant was to ask him not only to change one of his most significant cultural practices, but also to threaten his self-sufficiency and even his survival. Despite the difficulty of concealing this process—slaughtering and rendering a pig is obviously a lengthy, arduous, and at least briefly a very noisy task—peasants responded to collectivization and the imposition of communist rule with a pig-killing spree.

Although specific data for the entire period were unavailable, a report for the week of 29 January 1951 reveals the contours of this outlawed but socially-normative behavior.[279] In that week alone, there were 180 sentences for illegal slaughter passed down: 26 defendants were labeled kulaks, the remainder working peasants. As with other crimes, kulaks got the worst of it. Over half of all working peasants drew 3 months or less, and a majority of their sentences were suspended. Kulaks generally drew sentences

277 In 1953, the average Eastern European consumed about 17.6 kilograms of meat. Although this was slightly better than in the USSR (17.2 kg), it was still a third less than the prewar average and compared miserably to the American standard of 70 kg per annum. "'The 'New Course' and the Livestock Economy in the Soviet Bloc." CIA/RR IM-397, 17 September 1954, pp. 1, 10. This document is available online at http://www.foia.ucia.gov/ (viewed 9 December 2007).

278 *Magyar Közlöny*, 25 September 1948.

Chart 2.3 Nationwide *Feketevágás* Convictions for the Week of 29 January 1951



of 6 months or more. Kulaks also paid heavier fines, their transgression generally costing them over 300 forints (as against the 100-300 forint average fine for working peasants). The 10 acquittals were all working peasants. The gender distribution of this criminal population was also significant: fully ¼ of the sentences passed down for *feketevagás* were women, and from what specific case data is available it appears that they were always arrested as part of a group, rather than operating singly. This suggests that the gendered division of labor that typified *disznóölés* carried over into the illegal practice of

[279] MOL M-KS 276. 96 (Iü) / 8 ő.e., pp. 156-211.

pig killing under the communist regime: some Magyar peasants continued to slaughter pigs in the traditional fashion, despite the regime's sanction. However, in addition to now slaughtering their pigs on the sly, peasants responded to the criminalization of pig-killing with at least one other major change in praxis.

Historically, *disznóölés* meat had been salted and smoked, and then consumed sparingly by the peasant household so that it would last out the year. *Feketevágás* meat, on the other hand, was evidence of a recently-committed crime—and, in the meat-scarce Hungarian economy, it was also a lucrative product on the black market. A deposition sworn at the Sárospatak police department in summer 1951 provides some sense of how the black trade in meat was practiced. G.J. testified that on some evening towards the end of 1950, his acquaintance B. showed up on his doorstep and told him to grab his coat, as they were going to purchase some meat.

> I got in the car and we drove out to M.P.'s place, where we went into a room and B. started haggling with over the price with him. They were unable to reach an agreement on the price… I also recall that comrade B. and M.P. discussed the possibility of taking pigs from the neighboring *tszcs*. B. wanted to come back the day after tomorrow with the car.[280]

Given the lack of any supporting evidence, the motives behind depositions like these are impossible to determine: jealousy and coercion seem the most likely. Regardless, it is apparent that *feketevágás*, like wood theft, was now practiced for profit as well as subsistence throughout the period, and on a mass scale.

A monthly survey of *feketevágás* sentences from April 1953—just before the advent of the New Course—suggests a modal shift in the persecution and prosecution of

illegal slaughter and the trade in meat. In this month, 787 sentences were passed down.[281] Hungary had almost run out of kulaks by this point—they constituted less than 6% of these convictions. As in 1951, roughly two-thirds of all sentences were for less than 6 months. What is different from the earlier period is that the monetary penalties are much higher (almost half of them were over 1000 forints) and the penalties for the worst offenders were absurdly stringent. S.K., a Nagykallo seasonal worker, was caught selling two calves he had slaughtered illegally: he got a 2000-forint fine, another 2000 forints' worth of property confiscated, and 3 ½ years in prison. J.T., a Debrecen seasonal worker, was found guilty of slaughtering and selling more than 20 animals. His sentence was 2000 forints and five years. The absolute worst penalty in this report—and, in all likelihood, the most extreme punishment meted out for this crime in the entire period—fell on F.V., a kulak from Nagyatad who was found guilty of killing and selling 11 veal calves. He paid a 2000-forint fine, had all his property confiscated, and was sentenced to *eight* years in prison.[282] Despite excessive penalties such as these, *feketevágók* continued to ply their trade throughout the entire period.

As he had in the wood trade, after 1953 János swiftly established himself at the nexus of the illegal meat trade. As the other four butchers in his town had long since been forced out of business by the nationalization of the meat industry, he had no local

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[280] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) / 5 ő.e., pp. 123, 124-125.

[281] Regrettably, the available statistics do not disaggregate illegal slaughter form the general run of crimes against the public supply. Both the 1951 weekly and the 1953 monthly figures suggest an average of about 750 *feketevágás* convictions per month, which translates to 9000 cases per annum for the period of high stalinism.

[282] These men probably did not serve their full sentences—many of them would have been pardoned in 1953, and after 1956 the Kádár regime had much larger fish to fry. MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) / 17 ő.e., p. 123.

competition. At least every other week or so he would acquire an animal, generally a veal calf or cow, for 150 to 300 forints. He would then slaughter it and sell it off in portions of 12-20 kilos apiece. János's meat was priced to sell, at 12 to 16 forints per kilo—well below the official price of 22.50 forints (on the rare occasions it was available in stores). For sheep—available only on the black market in his vicinity—he was able to charge as much as 20 forints per kilo.[283] All in all, a tidy profit. Even if he didn't quite make the 3000-4000 forints per month he bragged about to the RFE interviewer, his illegal activities probably paid rather well.

János's activity was only the tip of the iceberg in his small town, however. Both his suppliers and customers were also active participants in the illegal economy. Peasants forced to sell their cows or pigs to the state farm at ridiculously low prices would instead injure the animals and then slaughter them "in an emergency." Animals were reported stolen and then slaughtered, carved up, and sold off before the police arrived. Perhaps the most interesting scam was one that János only heard about afterwards: after a disease struck a number of swine at a neighboring state farm, the peasants bought the corpses from the swineherd, reported the deaths of their animals, showed the local officials the carcasses of the diseased pigs, and then slaughtered and sold their healthy animals.[284] His customers ran the gamut from priests to the local authorities: nobody wanted to arrest the butcher that killed the golden calf. János was only the middleman: a talented one, certainly, but without the pervasive and widespread collusion of the village and the members of the local administration his activities would have been doomed. With supply

[283] OSA/RFE Items 2743/55, mf 52, p. 3.
[284] OSA/RFE Items 2743/55, mf 52, p. 9.

and demand both accounted for by a steady stream of contacts derived from both kinship ties and the village social network, all János required was a cogent distribution scheme. He hit upon the solution of using Roma, or gypsies,[285] as intermediaries in his illegal cottage industry.

The Advantages of Being Marginalized

The Roma presence in Hungary dates back to at least the early fifteenth century. As elsewhere in Europe throughout the succeeding centuries, they were invariably marginalized and often oppressed by a succession of governments. To take but one example, during the otherwise enlightened reign of Maria Theresa and Joseph II, over 8,300 Roma children were removed from their families and placed with Christian foster parents or in orphanages (1780) even as two hundred Roma were tried and executed on false charges of cannibalism (1782).[286] Until World War II, they managed to eke out a precarious existence via various skilled and itinerant crafts (smithing, woodworking, etc.) where possible; they also lived off illegal activity (theft, black-marketeering, etc.), which—combined with their distinctive appearance, dress, and customs—made for a pejorative cultural stereotype that then affected their treatment by society and the courts. Given the heightened and racialized nationalism of the early twentieth history, this

[285] A note on etymology: I will use 'Roma' throughout, as most scholars now concur that 'Gypsy' has a pejorative connotation. The latter term is a corruption of 'Egyptian' in western European languages (French, *gitan*; Spanish, *gitano*), based on a misapprehension of where the Roma originated; the Hungarian word for Roma, *cigány*, is derived from the Greek *athinganos*, or 'heathen,' as in German (*Zigeuner)* or many Slavic languages (*tsigan*, *cigan*). Donald Kendrick, *The Romani World* (Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2004), p. 1.

[286] David Crowe, "Hungary," in Crowe and John Kolsti, editors, *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1991), p. 117.

stereotype operated to lethal and predictable effect during World War II: the Roma were nearly exterminated in the Holocaust (*Pořajmos* in Romani). Like the Jews, they were rounded up and transported to Auschwitz and other extermination camps. Of the half million Roma that died in the Holocaust, roughly 30,000 were Hungarian.[287] In short, until the communists came to power, the story of the Roma in Hungary—as throughout Europe—is one of incessant marginality punctuated with interludes of outright oppression.

Thus, the communist regime's attempt to integrate the Roma into society was unique. Schooling, housing, combating anti-Roma sentiment via propaganda, and above all integration into the proletariat were the four planks of the party's Roma program.[288] They were encouraged to join the armed forces, the ÁVH, the local administration; schools and cultural opportunities were extended to the Roma settlements (*cigánytelepek*) on the outskirts of villages. A 1956 report from the legal branch of the administrative department, "On the Resolution of the Gypsy Question," summed up the accomplishments to date: of the 120-130,000 Roma then living in Hungary, fully 80,000 remained in Roma settlements—another 8,000 had no permanent address, in itself a remarkable admission for a regime that prided itself on monitoring its populace so closely. Many Roma had joined the party; many others were working in collective farms and various other industries. Life in the *cigánytelep* was still far from ideal: most of them were overcrowded and lacked running water and electricity. The illiteracy rate among

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[287] Crowe, "Hungary," p. 119. As with all casualty figures for the Holocaust, this number is widely debated. Some estimates place the number as high as 1-1.5 million, e.g., Hancock, "Chronology," in Crowe, and Kolsti, eds., *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*, p. 21.
[288] Michael Stewart, *The Time of the Gypsies* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), p. 97.

Roma was generally around 90%. According to the report, the cultural and moral development of the Roma was also a matter of some concern: unmarried couples frequently lived together, and polygamy and incest were commonplace. The regime's attempt to 'civilize' the Roma met with only partial success, as did its attempts to improve their living conditions. The propaganda against anti-Roma sentiment likewise foundered due to the fact—bluntly stated in the department report—that many of the members of the local party and administrative organs suffered from the very same prejudices they were trying to eradicate.[289]

The report also went into some detail about the Romani resistance to socialist work discipline, their insistence on continuing their traditional vocations such as horse-trading and tinkering, and their tendency to commit crimes.

> The gypsies also cause many problems in regard to public security: in certain categories of crime—crop and wood theft, robbery—gypsy criminality [*cigánybünözés*] signifies an unrelenting problem, especially for the rural population, or rather our police organs there. …In essence, the majority of gypsies live on the periphery of society, or often as parasites.[290]

The report urged increased proselytization by the DISz and other official organizations.[291]

The problem with Roma (and, incidentally, the anti-Roma bias mentioned in the above report) was spelled out even more bluntly in a detailed report from the Kaposvar district

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[289] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) / 49 ő.e., p. 544.
[290] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) / 49 ő.e., p. 543.
[291] But not, interestingly enough, the MNDSz. The women's organization was initially included in the list of organizations tasked with the socialization of the Roma, but it was crossed out by the (unknown) editor of the report. MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) / 49 ő.e., pp. 548, 550.

administration, from July of the same year. Although 900 of the district's 8000 Roma had joined the state farm and another 1500 worked for the state on a seasonal basis,

> A number of the Roma just don't want to work. They acquire one form of travel documents or another and then use that to justify their going from village to village, being vagrants and stealing. Many of them work only in the summer season, but not in the winter. In the winter they live from begging and theft. … Quite a lot of them steal chickens or grain. In one case, in Siófok district, they also beat a watchman who caught them in the act of stealing grain.[292]

Enemies of enemies were not allies, however. the Kaposvar Roma ran afoul of the Magyar peasantry as well.

> In Szulok district, even to this day the gypsies and peasants frequently brawl in the tavern. There is such friction that they will quarrel over any crime, large or small. If someone steals something, whether from a house or a field, the village public opinion is that it could only have been done by a gypsy. This antipathy is based in part on the fact that among the gypsies are those who genuinely are thieves or commit various other crimes, thus damning the entire gypsy population by association.[293]

On this point, at least, the regime and the peasantry concurred: gypsies were crime-prone. Their criminality was doubly articulated by their marginal status. Their inability and unwillingness to assimilate[294] not only predisposed them to a life of crime, but also made them the most likely suspects when something did occur. Despite its many failings, the

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[292] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) / 49 ő.e., pp. 538-539.

[293] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) / 49 ő.e., p. 540.

[294] Ian Hancock neatly sums up the bind Roma found themselves in: "Forbidden to do business with shopkeepers, the Roma have had to rely upon subsistence theft to feed their families; and thus stealing has become a part of the stereotype. Forbidden to use town pumps or wells, denied water by fearful householders, uncleanliness becomes part of the stereotype." However, Roma culture is traditionally also very wary of outsiders, which was conducive to their self-marginalization. "Introduction," in Crowe and Kolsti, eds., *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*, p. 6.

communist administration did make some effort to better their existence—much more, we must note, than had any prior regime in Hungary. Moreover, their long experience of operating on the margins of the legal economy seems to have come in handy when, under the communist system, entire branches of the rural economy became criminalized.

During the 1950s, some Roma made out like bandits. According to one 1955 RFE informant, the Roma settlement at Felsőrajk was undergoing a veritable "golden age of the gypsies" ("*A cigányság aranykora*") as a result of socialist rule. Although sanitary conditions remained substandard, they had improved somewhat since the war; the birth rate had finally eclipsed the death rate, and deaths from tuberculosis were at an all-time low. There was a school for the Roma children, and practically every family had a cart and a horse or two. This community of 20 families had relied on woodworking for its primary source of income until 1948, when it became impossible for them to acquire wood legally. This drove this community of Roma entirely into the shadow economy, but one of them was able to obtain a position on the local council at Zalaegerszeg. Therafter they experienced little trouble with the law. Of course, their supply of firewood was illegally harvested from the nearby state forest.[295] Another Roma, an 18-year old youth from Bácsalmás, reported his successes as a peddler. Despite his prior record—he had been arrested in 1954 for operating without a license—he was able to obtain a trade license with very little difficulty from the local council, and supported his six-person family by traveling to trade fairs throughout the region.[296] János certainly kept a number of Roma in work. He used them as "front" buyers for animals when possible, and also

[295] OSA/RFE Items 7549/55, mf 58.
[296] OSA/RFE Items 5459/55, mf 55.

for distributing meat after the slaughter. For helping him distribute his product, the Roma received their wages largely in kine: a few kilos of meat, the intestines, and also some wine.[297] Although this income did not quite justify the risk involved, it was a niche economic role that was actually created by the regime's attempts to regulate the economy. Accustomed as they were to operating on the margins of society and the official economy, the Roma were perhaps less disadvantaged than the ordinary Magyar peasant when widespread passive resistance and the black economy assumed its preeminence under communist rule.

* * *

It was too good to last. Perhaps János S. cheated someone in a deal or was denounced by a fellow villager; in any case, by the end of 1954 he was getting careless. His dealings in wood had progressed past the circle of his immediate acquaintances. He had become similarly nonchalant about maintaining secrecy and deniability in the pig trade, as he had customers knocking on his door day and night.[298] His black-marketeering career came to an abrupt end one night in late 1954. As János tells it, a black jeep pulled up in front of his house and several members of the ÁVH emerged just as he was carving up a slaughtered calf; it was obvious the jig was up. János somehow managed to give them the slip, and—apparently abandoning his wife without a second thought—walked to Nyiregyhaza, caught a night train to Budapest, and from there made

[297] OSA/RFE Items 2743/55, mf 52, p. 4.
[298] OSA/RFE Items 2743/55 mf 52, p. 2.

his way into Austria.[299] His intention, as he explained it to his RFE interviewer, was to somehow make his way to America and go into business there. With this, he vanished from the historical record forever.

What, then, are we to make of his story? I suspect he exaggerated his income and certain other minor aspects of his account, but taken in conjunction with the archival evidence, his story rings true. Collectivization engendered widespread unrest and resistance; this in turn legitimized illicit behavior. Peasants drew on a long tradition of stubborn resistance to outside authority in hiding their harvests, torching unguarded state possessions, falsifying their records, and otherwise eluding the state's aegis. This would have been impossible without collusion at the local level; administrators were far more likely to obey their immediate needs of survival (and opportunities for profit or acquiring scarce commodities) than the unrealistic directives emanating from Budapest.

More specifically, the crimes of wood theft and *feketevágás* reveal the stubborn persistence of the past in rural Hungary. Like its predecessors, the communist state was largely unable to halt the centuries-old practice of wood theft. Peasants were swift to realize the limits of the state's surveillance and co-opt its local representatives. Although criminalizing pig-killing would have generated a cultural backlash regardless, in the context of the meat-scarce rural economy it was tantamount to enticing the peasants to embark on lives of crime. The central irony in both of these forms of peasant resistance is that they were practiced not only for subsistence, but also exchange. The illicit products were *commodified*: in attempting to establish a socialist economy, the

[299] According to János, he managed to distract them and then slip out the back. A bribe seems more likely. His wife did not figure largely in his story throughout. OSA/RFE Items 1370/55 mf 50, pp. 5-6.

state actually provoked capitalist tendencies among the peasantry. These tendencies persisted throughout the communist period.

Although scholars concur on this outcome of peasant resistance in Hungary, they differ on its causes. Writing in 1988, Iván Szelényi argued that "after three decades of mainly silent, passive resistance," former Hungarian peasants "seem to be winning. They certainly have not 'overthrown' the 'bureaucratic class,' but they have forced them into lasting and strategically important concessions. Gradually, they have reinterpreted the rules of the game of state socialism and have transformed society into a structure complex enough that they can achieve within it living conditions that they find acceptable." Szelényi argues that the force guiding this process was a class of prewar "incipient entrepreneurs," whose development into full-blown capitalists was only temporarily derailed by the onset of communism.[300] Martha Lampland concurs that the peasantry was able to wrest significant concessions from the regime, but she differs with his rationale for this outcome. Lampland instead finds that these entrepreneurial tendencies were apparent throughout the Magyar peasantry, not just the proto-bourgeoisie—and that they evolved in response to the intrusions of the socialist state: "The great irony of the socialist state's impact is to have generalized attitudes [i.e., rampant individualism and utilitarianism, a bootstrap mentality] across the entire populace which are usually defined as capitalist."[301] My account does not quite reconcile this debate. With his 'proper' peasant background and parentage, János fits readily into Szelényi's paradigm of an upwardly-mobile protocapitalist. On the other hand, many

[300] Szelényi, *Socialist Entrepreneurs*, pp. 4, 210.
[301] Lampland, *Object of Labor*, pp. 333, 1-2.

other *feketevágok* were drawn from the ranks of the seasonal laborers and other lower rungs on the rural social ladder, and Roma occupied a key intermediary point in the illicit economy. Both these points support Lampland's claim. It seems likely that the rich or middle peasant's extended networks of kinship and village relations eased his (or her) illicit interactions, but in the final analysis—given the relative inefficiency of the regime in the countryside—everyday crime was an option open to all ranks of the social hierarchy.

This and the preceding chapter reveal a gaping chasm between the public and hidden transcripts of life in communist Hungary. Communist industrialization and collectivization mobilized large segments of Hungarian society against the regime. The tendency of many of the regime's monitors to opt for collusion rather than confrontation rendered the regime unable to present a united front against its unruly subjects. Magyars relied on informal social networks, such as shop floor allegiances, the black economy, and local kinship and village affiliations to wrestle some degree of autonomy and agency from the state. However, societies are also not monolithic entities. The apparent uniformity of criminal behavior and resistance in both city and countryside masked deeper social divisions. As we have seen herein, both peasants and their monitors shared traditional anti-Roma sentiments;. At least two other major social divisions also characterized Hungarian society in the 1950s: gender-based and generational hierarchies. As we shall see in the following two chapters, the party-state's few nominal successes resulted from the close parallel between its intentions and these underlying social tensions.

CHAPTER 3: GENDER, CRIME, AND COMMUNISM

> A man and his son are going for a walk. The son sees a woman walking towards them and exclaims, "Look, dad, there's an English spy!"
>
> After she passes, the bemused father asks his son to explain his conclusion.
>
> The son says, "Well, she's wearing a hat, elegant, young, and pretty … and she's not pregnant."
>
> —a Hungarian joke from 1953[302]

There is very little funny about this joke's outright misogyny and implicit celebration of the male gaze, but as a cultural artifact—offering, as it does, an entry-point to a foreign system of meaning—its historical value is significantly greater.[303] This caricatured "deviant" body reveals in turn the normative gender codes at work in Hungarian society at the time. There was, indeed, a short-lived increase in the birth rate in 1953 and 1954, and even the least perceptive visitors to Budapest noted the ubiquity of pregnant women in the shops and streets.[304] However, this baby boom was not the product of postwar affluence and ebullience as it was in the west. It was instead the result of an intrusive population policy imposed by the state in the face of a declining birth rate. The trope that ideologically-sound women dressed plainly was also no

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[302] OSA/RFE Items 12475/53, mf 32.

[303] On jokes, see Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), pp. 77-78. According to Koestler's taxonomy of humor, the operative mode here is a condensed form of caricature, or satire: "The *satire* is a verbal caricature which distorts characteristic features of an individual or society by exaggeration and simplification. ... The comic effect of the satire is derived from the simultaneous presence, in the reader's mind, of the social reality with which he is familiar, and of its reflection in the distorting mirror of the satirist. It focuses attention on abuses and deformities in society of which, blunted by habit, we were no longer aware." Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (London: Penguin, 1964), pp. 72-73.

[304] See, e.g., OSA/RFE Items 6699/53 mf 25, OSA/RFE Items 61/54 mf 32, and OSA/RFE 9734/54 mf 35; in the lattermost source, an American lieutenant who accompanied an athletic team to Budapest in 1954 noted that most Hungarian women "seem to be in need of reducing and dieting" (!) even as he commented on the widespread destitution and hardship among the populace.

laughing matter, as dressing in an overtly stylish manner did not go unnoticed—by either joke-tellers or regime monitors. As one émigré recalled during her interview in 1957,

> [D]uring the revolution I was given my *kader* sheet. I read it with interest and I was surprised for it wasn't very bad. It noted that I was of bourgeois background and of bourgeois disposition and that I was cosmopolitan which was a bad adjective. I was dressing in a cosmopolitan way, because I followed French fashion as much as I could and I used pink lipstick, while the proper communists, following the outdated Soviet women, used red or purple. Of course, once pink became acceptable in Russia, we too could wear it with impunity. I also committed the error of wearing gloves on the street.[305]

In short, even minor, "cosmopolitan" stylistic transgressions entered one's personal record as signifiers of deviance—and therefore political unreliability as well. The humor in this joke, such as it is, was predicated largely on a reified stereotype of socialist woman—chaste, plainly-dressed, and pregnant—and the obviously deviant, and potentially criminal, character of any female body that did not conform to those rules.

Since the 1980s, a number of scholars have created and contributed to the historiographical and sociological literature on women and gender in socialist Hungary. The bulk of this scholarship concurs that the various communist schemes to establish gender equality—the right to equal pay for equal work, to a divorce, to reproductive freedom—were generally halfhearted and contradictory, and foundered on preexisting

[305] The kader sheet was one's personal file with the ÁVH. CUHRP Interview 245, Box 13, pp. 15-16.

patriarchal norms. [306] The result, as women moved into workplace and administrative positions previously reserved for men only, was widespread male resentment of "socialist women," as the precept of gender equality was damned by association with communism.[307] The early Soviet period of intensive industrialization and collectivization was the most important formative moment in this historical trajectory; however, as yet no scholar has drawn upon the newly-available archival evidence and focused expressly on the politics of work, sexuality, and abortion during the period 1948-1956. Herein I discuss how the regime attempted to mobilize Magyar women as workers, and the patriarchal backlash that followed; the implications of communist prostitution policy as an intrusive means of policing female sexuality; and the party-state's pronatalist scheme, which succeeded only insofar as it successfully drew upon male resentment of intrusive communist women.

The communist regime's egalitarian gender policy was dictated by both the ideological precept of the equality of all workers and the real demands of the industrializing project. After 1948, women were encouraged to take up careers in all fields, even to the point of working in heavy industry, serving on the police force, driving

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[306] See Éva Fodor, *Working Difference: Women's Working Lives in Hungary and Austria, 1945-1995* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), Lynn Haney, *Inventing the Needy: Gender and the Politics of Welfare in Hungary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), Chris Corrin, *Magyar Women* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1994), Martha Lampland, "Biographies of Liberation: Testimonials to Labor in Socialist Hungary," in Sonia Kruks, Rayna Rapp, and Marilyn B. Young, editors, *Promissory Notes: Women in the Transition to Socialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989), and especially the work of Andrea Pető, most notably "Women's Rights in Hungary: The Abortion Trials of 1952-53," *Hungarian Studies Review*, Vol. XXIX Nos. 1-2 (2002), *Hungarian Women in Politics 1945-1951* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2001), "'As He Saw Her': Gender Politics in Secret Party Reports During the 1950s," (Budapest: CEU Working Paper Series 1, 1994), and "Women's Employment and Lifestyle in a Hungarian City of Heavy Industries in the Fifties," (Budapest: CEU History Department Yearbook, 1993).

[307] See Joanna Goven, "The Gendered Foundations of Hungarian Socialism: State, Society, and the Anti-politics of Anti-feminism, 1948-1990," (PhD dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1993).

tractors, and other previously masculine-coded jobs. As a result of this policy, many acquired a previously-impossible degree of economic freedom. This newfound economic autonomy was matched by a new availability of political roles as well. The MDP, the Democratic Association of Hungarian Women [*Magyar Nök Demokratikus Szövetsége*, or MNDSz), and other regime-sanctioned agitational work offered alternate routes for advancement and empowerment. The communist regime indeed empowered some women—but this occurred under the broader auspices of a state bent on subjugating all its subjects. A certain degree of resentment towards "socialist women" ensued. The socialist regime's treatment of gender-coded modes of deviance[308] reflected this preoccupation with productive work and reproduction.

Prostitution policy reveals much about communism's stance towards female sexuality and criminality.[309] Prior to the socialist takeover, prostitution was legal, albeit heavily policed; its social function, as throughout Europe, was to support patriarchy by strictly defining the bounds of permissible female behavior. After 1948, it was

[308] By this I simply mean those forms of crime and deviance that are contingent upon the presence of female-gendered subjects in their commission. Male prostitution seems to have been scarce or nonexistent (or, possibly, extremely well-hidden) in communist Hungary.

[309] Although the study of prostitution has been established as a field of historical inquiry, research on Eastern Europe remains scant; for the communist period therein, practically nonexistent. Ivan Volgyes and John G. Peters, "Social Deviance in Hungary: the case of prostitution," in Volgyes, editor, *Social Deviance in Eastern Europe* (Boulder: Westview, 1978), is the only article I know of on prostitution in Hungary during the communist period. On prostitution in its broader European context, see Alain Corbin's *Women for Hire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990) and Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). The current polemic between radical and postmodern feminists—as to whether prostitution inherently supports dominant patriarchy or should instead be considered another form of "work," in which women can enjoy some degree of empowerment and agency—is somewhat extraneous to our purposes here, as intentionality on the part of those women labeled prostitutes by the regime is impossible to determine. Readers concerned with this issue should turn to Sheila Jeffreys' *The Idea of Prostitution* (North Melbourne: Spinifex, 1997) and Shannon Bell's *Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) for two representative and diametrically opposed perspectives in this debate.

criminalized, labeled an unwelcome holdover from the bourgeois past (as with theft, embezzling, and the other "bourgeois" modes of crime and deviance discussed in the previous chapters), and blamed for the spread of sexually-transmitted diseases and other ailments of the body social. Prostitution persisted regardless; after the 1953 amnesty, it flourished anew. Many of these women labeled prostitutes by the regime were in fact working women who practiced casual prostitution on the side; many may have been guilty merely of transgressing sartorial or behavioral norms. In any case, the regime broadened its regulatory gaze: in addition to its surveillance of bars and cafes, it also sought to include in its purview the residences of "dubious" women—in short, all those who were unmarried or jobless. Despite these measures, state monitors proved unable to control this mode of gendered deviance. Prostitution rapidly came to serve the same patriarchal social function it had under capitalism, and it persisted throughout the communist period.

Illegal abortion (*magzatelhajtás*) was considered a much more serious crime by the socialist regime. Alarmed by the falling birth rate, the regime criminalized abortion in February 1953. Most scholars interpret the brief upswing in the national birthrate (in 1953 and 1954) in this light, concluding that the state successfully forced women to reproduce.[310] However, Andrea Pető has recently advanced an alternate interpretation of the politics of reproduction under communism. Noting the persistence and prevalence of an underground network of abortion providers, she concludes instead that "solidarity within society was able to function—and did function—even in the case of ever-

[310] See, e.g., Haney, *Inventing the Needy*, p. 32, Fodor, *Working Difference*, pp. 122-23, and Goven, "Gendered Foundations", fn 18, p. 32.

increasing police vigilance…. institutionalized regulation of female fertility failed in less than a year [i.e., by January 1954]…. it failed because of human, female solidarity, which sprang into action out of necessity and as a result of oppression."[311] My evidence bears out Pető's argument. The question, then, is how to account for the apparent success of the regime's pronatalist campaign in 1953 and 1954. The most likely explanation is that the regime's reproductive drive coincided with a resurgence of patriarchy in shop floor infrapolitics and society: during the New Course, women were forced into lower-paying jobs or out of work altogether. At the same time, the regime made having children more economically viable than it had been in the past. The nominal success (in raw demographic terms) of the pronatalist drive was not due to the criminalization of abortion. Rather, it was due to a symbiosis between the dual strands of post-1953 reproductive policy—which consisted of both legal penalties for getting an abortion, and financial benefits for having children—and the persistence of traditional notions of patriarchal control over reproduction.

Prostitution and abortion policy reveal complex dimensions of crime, deviance, and resistance in Communist Hungary. As we have seen in the previous two chapters, the criminalization of many social, economic, and cultural behaviors and interactions led to many forms of criminality acquiring a certain social respectability, or at least tolerance. Many of these behaviors were also construed as resistance by their practicioners as well as the legal armature of the state. This close parallel between crime and resistance is not as apparent for these gendered modes of deviance. Regime policy aligned itself with underlying patriarchal norms. Women's bodies were much more

[311] Pető, "Women's Rights," pp. 61, 72.

closely policed than they had been in the past, or than those of their male counterparts. Those Magyar women who aspired to the same sexual and reproductive freedom men enjoyed as a matter of course found themselves up against not only state policies but also patriarchal antipathy. To the extent these deviant behaviors constituted a form of resistance, it was one that militated against both communist policy and underlying patriarchal norms.

Socialism With a Female Face

The mobilization of Magyar women in industry was not a socialist innovation. Before World War II, they entered the proletariat in Hungary much as elsewhere in Europe: primarily in the textile and light industries, and almost without exception in the lower brackets of the wage scale. By 1920, 129,000 women had entered the world of wage labor; this constituted roughly 19% of the total workforce, and this percentage remained roughly constant throughout the interwar period. By 1930, fully 169,000 women worked outside the home.[312] World War II acted as a catalyst for women's participation in the workforce, as women took the places of the hundreds of thousands of men off at the front. However, it was only during the Rákosi era that their presence in industry really exploded.

The regime's decision to mobilize women in industrial production was based partially in ideological concerns but primarily in pragmatism. Gender equality has long

[312] Zsuzsa Fonó, *A Magyar Munkásnők Helyzete és Szervezettsége a Két Világháboru Között* (Budapest: Szakszervezetek Elméleti Kutató Intézete, 1978). p. 6.

been a precept of socialist theory,[313] and certain of the new laws reflected this underlying preoccupation. Divorce law had already been liberalized in the immediate postwar period, and the communist system did nothing to stifle this progressive development.[314] According to the 1952 family code, women enjoyed equal property ownership with their spouses; alimony proceedings were made much easier, and women were allowed to keep their own names after marriage.[315] The abolition of gender inequality (in the abstract) was doubtless an attractive notion to many. However, ideology aside, the MDP's main preoccupation was with the vast cadres of workers necessary for "building socialism." Women were a major, largely-untapped labor pool. After 1948, enterprises were encouraged to hire women for all positions, even those for which women were previously thought biologically unfit (e.g., in heavy industry). In 1951, precise quotas were set for women in all industries: official policy dictated that women must constitute 60% of all bricklayers, 40% of all carpenters, and so forth, dictating a vast increase in the number of women in many industrial occupations.[316]

On paper, at least, this quota policy made significant progress towards redressing the gender gap. The number of women in the workforce more than doubled between

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313 Corrin, "Introduction," in *Superwomen and the Double Burden*, edited by Corrin (London: Scarlet Press, 1992), pp. 11-12.

314 In 1938, there were 5754 divorces in Hungary. In 1948, there were 11,058 divorces per year; by 1960, 16,590 divorces were granted by the courts. Erika Rév, *Váloperek krónikája* [A Chronicle of Divorce Trials] (Budapest: Kossuth 1986), pp. 99, 173.

315 "Az új családjogi törveny [The New Family Law]," in Sándor Balogh, editor, *Nehéz Esztendők Krónikája 1949-1953: Dokumentumok* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1986), pp. 433-443. Prior to WW II, a wife would generally be addressed by her husband's name plus the suffix *–né*. It seems that very few women actually took advantage of this new scheme; even party officials went by their married name more often than not.

316 Gyula Belényi, editor, *Munkások Magyarországon 1948-1956* [Workers in Hungary, 1948-1956], (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2000), p. 171.

1938 and 1953, rising from 172,000 to 371,000.[317] By 1955, women made up one-third of the total workforce.[318] From 1949 to 1960, fully 75% of people joining the workforce were women.[319] Women made up more than 60% of the workforce of many factories, especially in the lighter industries. The men's clothing enterprise in Budapest employed 2500 workers, of which over 70% were women; the same percentage of female workers was apparent in the Szombathely Leather and Footwear Factory, the Nyiregyhaza tobacco factory, and numerous other enterprises throughout Hungary. In heavy industry, these percentages were lower but still significant: for instance, the 4th April Machine Factory in Budapest's XIth district employed 150 women out of a total workforce of 950, and of the 900 workers at Brickmaking Factory #4 in Győr, 15% were women. [320] This egalitarian quota policy was applied even to occupations that had previously been the exclusive domain of males, such as the police force.[321] Although few industrial concerns were successful in fulfilling the gender quota, their managers were regularly pressured to hire more women and promote them to positions of responsibility.

The most concerted agitation by the regime for gender equality in the workplace was in the *traktorlány*, or female tractor driver, propaganda campaign, and its failings are suggestive of the problems that plagued the mobilization of women in industry. Women were encouraged to join the collective and state farms but especially to train and work in

[317] Romsics, p. 275.
[318] Haney, *Inventing the Needy*, p. 33.
[319] Chris Corrin, *Superwomen and the Double Burden* (London: Scarlet Press, 1992), p. 34.
[320] OSA/RFE Items 9429/55, mf 60, OSA/RFE Items 11515/56 mf 62, OSA/RFE Items 206/52, mf 6, and OSA/RFE Items 2821/52, mf 7.
[321] See Pető, *Hungarian Women*, Chapter 10 on policewomen.

agricultural production as *traktorlányok*.[322] The quota for female participation was set at 50 percent. After a brief training course, women—some as young as 16[323]—were sent out to these prestigious positions at machine-stations (*gépállomások*) throughout Hungary, where they then drove the tractors and harvesters the expanding network of state and collective farms relied upon. In the spring of 1953, one intrepid young *traktorlány*, M.M., wrote a series of letters to *Szabad Ifjúság*[324] singing the praises of her new occupation. In May, she bragged of her success (and that of her sister tractor-drivers) in overfulfilling the plan. In July, she sang the praises of the training program she had just attended.[325] One of her earlier letters, sent in February, provides insight into the editing praxis at *Szabad Ifjúság* as well: from the archival report of that week's letters to the editor we know that she also lamented the scarcity of women at her tractor station, and in that same week another *traktorlány* wrote in complaining that her work was unappreciated. These complaints are invisible in the 12 February edition of *Szabad Ifjúsag*, where M.M.'s letter was published under the heading "We appreciate our female workforce (*Nálunk megbecsülik a női munkaerőt*)"—with her critical statement excised. In the published version, the workers at M.M.'s machine station come across as a big, happy family: the older (and predominantly male) workers respect their younger counterparts, and realize the benefit of the tractor-driving schools, while on their part the younger workers follow advice willingly and industriously dedicate themselves to their

[322] Gyöngyi Farkas, "'Gyertek lányok traktorra!:' Női traktorosok a gépállomáson és a propagandában,'" in *Korall*, Volume 13 (September 2003).
[323] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 / 49 ő.e., p. 1.
[324] *Szabad Ifjuság*, or "Free Youth," was the DISz newspaper.
[325] MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 673 ő.e., pp. 74, 108.

work and to further training courses.[326] Another *traktorlány* told of how her supervisor even encouraged her to pursue fulfillment in her private life as well, telling her "just because you get married doesn't mean you should divorce the tractor."[327] Editorial bias aside, it seems that M.M. and some of her fellow tractor-women were able to succeed and possibly even excel in this field.

However, in general the *traktorlány* program did not live up to the expectations of either the regime or the women themselves. A June 1953 *Szabad Ifjúság* article announced that the total percentage of female tractor drivers was still "intolerably" low, only 12 to 13 percent against the mandated 50 percent.[328] Moreover, their enforced presence at these commanding heights of the rural economy did not translate to recognition of their achievements: after the 1952 harvest, women received only 1 of 39 outstanding awards for operating harvesters, 1 of 14 for operating combines, and 3 of 14 in the catchall category of "individual achievement" ("*egyeni eredmények*").[329] A number of letters received by *Szabad Ifjuság* and other media outlets complained that the efforts of women in the machine-stations were not appreciated.[330] In 1955, a woman tractor-driver at the Red Star station wrote to the state radio station that after the most recent norm increase, she generally made only about 22 to 49% of her new production quota; she intended to look for another job if her workload was not lessened.[331] Very few

[326] MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 673 ő.e., p. 22.
[327] MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 673 ő.e., p. 3.
[328] Cited in OSA/RFE Items 113/54, mf 32.
[329] MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 45 ő.e., p. 45.
[330] MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 673 ő.e., pp. 2, 22.
[331] MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 421 ő.e., p. 7a.

traktorlányok remained at their jobs long after training, and job turnover was high.[332] As was the case for practically every aspect of life in Rákosi's Hungary, the joyful portrait painted by the regime differed immensely from how Hungarian women (and men) experienced work in their everyday lives.

The contentious experience of the *traktolányok* was representative of women's work experience throughout the late 1940s and 1950s. Women's presence in increased numbers in industry did not translate to social or economic parity with their male counterparts. The managers of socialized enterprises—caught as they were between the unrealistic demands of state planners and a shortage of skilled labor and materials—came to rely heavily on the prewar elite of male, skilled workers.[333] Despite the lack of any real representation in the party-run unions and the relatively limited options for organized resistance, this shop floor patriarchy still enjoyed some influence in how the factories were run. As Mark Pittaway argues, "Skilled workers sat at the apex of a hierarchy where women, the young, those commuting from rural areas not to mention the semi-skilled and unskilled were placed in a subordinate position within shop floor culture…. State attempts to introduce women to traditionally male occupations were defeated by furious and successful resistance among the men."[334] These immediate economic concerns about female labor were compounded by traditional patriarchal notions of "woman's work" and the woman's role in the family. One young worker recalled that

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[332] Some statistics: in Hajdu-Bihar county, of the 410 women who had been trained to drive tractors by the winter of 1952, only 110 were still working. Between April and August of 1952, 781 new women tractor-drivers were trained, but 632 left the machine-stations: in August 1952, there were 1835 *traktorlányok* in the entire country. Farkas, "Gyertek lányok traktorra!," p. 70.

[333] Mark Pittaway, "The Social Limits of State Control: Time, the Industrial Wage Relation, and Social Identity in Stalinist Hungary," *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Volume 12, Number 3 (September 1999), p. 287, and "Az állami ellenõrzés társadalmi korlátainak újraértékelése," especially pp. 79-80.

"At the weaving mill and wood finery in Budapest I had an inferiority complex. Most of the fellow workers were women and I felt that I did a job that could be accomplished well by women.[335] Another émigré stated, "Women should be returned to their place in the family.... By the woman's full-time job, both the family and the woman are loosing [sic] of their dignity, of their moral value, and of their character as a society-stabilizing force."[336] Yet another 1957 interviewee concurred:

> I do not think [the mobilization of women in industry] was a good thing. I reject it because it represents the first step towards the systematic destruction of healthy family life. There are, of course, girls who want to work and who do not intend to marry. The primary purpose and natural task of women remains, nevertheless, motherhood and the rearing of children.[337]

Whether due to traditional notions of a woman's place in the home or the real economic threat they posed skilled male workers, the regime's inclusion of women in the industrial workforce was complicated by a substratum of male resentment. As we shall see, further complications arose when women tried to fulfill their reproductive "responsibility" as well.

Similar problems arose in the administration's attempt to include women in political activity. By 1952, women made up 29% of the MDP's membership and actively participated in the administration and organization of party affairs, but they were seldom

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[334] Pittaway, "Az állami ellenõrzés társadalmi korlátainak újraértékelése," pp. 3, 20.
[335] CUHRP Interview 107, Box 7, p. 23.
[336] CUHRP Interview 118, Box 8, p. 29.
[337] CUHRP Interview 152, Box 10, p. 285.

admitted to top positions.[338] The main opportunity for women's involvement in politics was the MNDSz. This women's organization was originally founded in 1945 as a charitable society (albeit secretly funded by the party) devoted to immediate postwar needs such as rubble clearance and caring for returned prisoners of war. The MNDSz openly assumed the character of a political organization after 1948, and by 1951 had absorbed all other women's organizations with "salami tactics" analogous to Rákosi's scheme of consolidating political power.[339] By 1950, the membership of the women's organization numbered 600,000 women, one-third of them in Budapest alone.[340] MNDSz puppet shows, lectures, and especially reading circles (*olvasókör*) spread the good word of socialism throughout the cities and countryside. As MNDSz members, women were in charge of many of the mundane tasks of organizing gatherings, arranging decorations for parades, and so forth. In addition to this traditional behind-the-scenes "woman's work," however, MNDSz members were also expected to devote themselves to enlightening and educating their fellow women workers and at times men as well. This proselytization often took intrusive form, and it was not limited to lecture halls and formal meetings.

MNDSz activists were also mobilized in the workplace in efforts to encourage their coworkers to greater productivity**.** A 1950 attitude survey of Budapest workers conducted after a major norm revaluation is instructive in this regard. The MNDSz factory workers were given the responsibility of demonstrating, via agitational lectures

[338] Total party membership at this time was 945,606. See Fodor, p. 87, for the gender distribution of the party throughout the communist period.
[339] On the history of the MNDSz, see Pető, *Hungarian Women*, Chapter 3.
[340] MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 651 ő.e., p. 8.

and their own performance, that the higher new quotas were attainable. Initially, the report suggests that this demonstration met with some success:

> In the Rákosi Works Bicycle Shop #3, where the old norm was lax and the new norm resulted in an average 100 forint wage reduction, morale was bad. Good agitational work was accomplished: the attitude of the women workers was changed and they endeavored with greater diligence to step up production. In Bicycle Shop #2 the more unenlightened [*öntudatlanabb*] women workers sought to demonstrate that their norms were too stringent. Here also, with good informative work and the example shown by the MNDSz women, the disgruntled women workers were convinced of the error of their standpoint.

However, the report also conceded that this proselytizing mission was not successful across the board: in the Orion radio factory, where the MNDSz demonstration was targeted at recalcitrant men as well, the report notes merely that 14 women were successful in reaching the new quota. In the Elzett factory, where the old norm was only infrequently met, the new norm was fulfilled only about 50 to 60% on average. Here the spectacle of stalwart stakhanovite labor provided by the MNDSz agitators was apparently inadequate: the workers' morale remained poor, the new production quota was not met. According to the report, "Here the party organization and the MNDSz are absolutely not finished with their agitational work."[341] The workers were quite aware that the new quotas required more work from them for less money; that this point was driven home by female activists made it no more acceptable.

MNDSz agitational work was further complicated by the dismissive attitude shown towards it by the other branches of the administration. Despite its mobilizatory

[341] MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 646 ő.e, p. 7. See also OSA/RFE Items 1092/53, mf 19, for an account of a normal MNDSz factory meeting.

potential, the women's organization was comparatively low on the regime's list of priorities. Funding was inadequate, and local party secretaries and other party and state officials often ignored the MNDSz activists as much as the peasant women did. As we have seen in Chapter 2, the farther one traveled from Budapest and the regional urban centers, the more haphazardly and sporadically the regime was able to monitor and control the rural population. An October 1952 report from the mine camps in Borsod county demonstrates this tempestuous relationship between the women's organization and the other local organs of authority. The MNDSz peace-loan subscription[342]—their main purpose in visiting the Borsod camp—was stymied by an ad-hoc party meeting that ran late; the local party organization also turned a deaf ear to the MNDSz's pleas for help with agitational work. The bitter author of the report also noted that the local women were passive and cared more about new furniture and paint for their houses than political involvement. MNDSz agitators even had to stay away from one Borsod mine camp altogether, as the "rough women" who lived there would not hesitate to physically attack the activists.[343] This report clashes with the upbeat tone of a December 1952 internal report on MNDSz activities, which found that matters had improved since the late 1940s. *Traktorlányok* and working-peasant women now met regularly, and many of the women participating in the reading circles were applying their newfound literacy towards studying for the party membership entrance exams. However, many of the district-level party secretaries still failed to record even the most basic data necessary for successful agitational work (e.g., the numbers of women entering the collective farms), and as a

[342] One of the major fundraising drives during the 1950s was for "peace-bonds" (*békekölcsön*) that ostensibly went towards funding the (Soviet-backed) international opposition to the Korean War.

result the county-level organizations' smooth operation was severely hampered.[344] Not only the peasantry but also the other branches of the administration often ignored the MNDSz's agitational work.

Overall, the track record of the women's organization was mixed. As with the DISz, it was not even popular among its constituents. Women were reluctant to join the organization, even more reluctant to come to meetings, and frequently failed to pay their membership fees. Even the wives of party members were hesitant to join.[345] One 1956 émigré, a former MNDSz member, recalled that she never paid her dues or went to meetings. When asked about the organization's goals, she replied "I don't know; I think they wanted to train groups of women to fight for equal rights."[346] Despite this widespread apathy and the problems noted above, the MNDSz did serve as a vehicle of advancement for some women. As admission was heavily biased in favor of women of peasant or working-class origin, women who had very few opportunities under the old regime were now able to control their destinies to a much greater degree than was previously possible. Over and above the advantages afforded the women who joined the MNDSz, its socializing mission was not entirely fruitless either. The reading circles, consisting of 5-15 women each, numbered 8000 by late 1952. Although illiteracy had been largely eradicated in the interwar period, many rural Magyar women had only rudimentary reading and writing skills. Despite the singularly uninspiring reading

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[343] MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 253 ő.e., pp. 45, 46, 50.
[344] MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 646 ő.e., pp. 153-154.
[345] MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 646 ő.e., p. 5.
[346] CUHRP Interview 134, Box 9, p. 34.

materials the *olvasókörok* offered,[347] they still provided the opportunity to acquire functional literacy—and perhaps more importantly, they also provided the basic grammar of "speaking Bolshevik"[348] in which appeals to the state and justifications of one's behavior must be couched if they were to enjoy any degree of success.

In addition to serving in the MNDSz, women also often served as *népnevelők,* or "people's educators." This form of agitation required routine and unwelcome visits to peoples' homes, demanding their scarce time and money for subscriptions to the party newspaper *Szabad Nép*, scrap-metal collecting drives, and so forth. One ex-*népnevelő* recounted her experience in the working-class XIIIth District to a RFE interviewer in 1952 at some length: In addition to her weekly party meetings and biweekly *népnevelő* meetings, she and the other agitators also met once a week with the local apparat of building supervisors, party secretaries, and other officials. At these two-hour meetings, the party secretary in charge would explain the current propaganda line, lecture on general questions of domestic and foreign policy, discipline any agitators who had cut meetings or committed other transgressions, and set assignments for the upcoming week. Travelling in pairs, the agitators would then visit their assigned addresses. They would start by ascertaining their targets' standing with the party and making sure they were

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[347] According to a November 1950 directive from the MNDSz Budapest office to the regional organizations, "The following must be included in the reading circle's resources: some examples of Soviet belles-lettres (*szépirodalom*) that illustrate how Soviet men and women love their country, how they know how to work and understand how to fight. [They should include] such materials that delineate the Soviet Union's peace politics and the imperialists' warlike intentions. [They should include] such publications that illustrate how heroic women have struggled against oppression in the imperialist countries. We must ensure that the reading circle's materials are not abstract, but comprehensively cover every topic, so that women learn about international solidarity, patriotism, and the remorseless struggle against the hatred of internal and external enemies." MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 646 ő.e., p. 22.

[348] On 'speaking Bolshevik,' or using communist rhetoric as a discursive means to advance one's own ends, see Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), Chapter 5.

subscribed to *Szabad Nép*, the party newspaper. Depending on the subject's status and willingness to buy into whatever fundraising scheme was currently in the works, they might be there as little as an hour; they might also stay two or more hours as circumstances dictated. They would then write up reports on their visits, detailing their successes and identifying those households that would require more attention on future visits. All told, evening *népnevelő* work consumed at least five additional hours of (unpaid) work per week.[349] Agitation in the workplace was even more intrusive: a young locksmith in a Budapest precision-tool shop recounted how her position required her to harass workers who came in to work late, dodged meetings, or failed to properly maintain their machines. According to this latter source, failure to carry out one's assigned *népnevelő* tasks or skipping too many meetings could result in demotion and salary cuts.[350] Like the MNDSz activists, the *népnevelők* were often tasked with the least popular agitprop jobs.

The extent to which labor and political activity empowered women was eclipsed by both their continued responsibility for household tasks and the resentment generated by their intrusion into public life. The state's visionary promises of nurseries, crèches, and other household labor-saving projects remained on the drawing board until well into the 1960s.[351] Women remained the ones responsible for the cooking, laundry, shopping, and household chores in the classic "double burden"—or even "triple burden," if we include the expectation of political activity as a separate form of labor—that was the

[349] OSA/RFE Items 13494/52 mf 15 and 13494/52 mf 15.
[350] OSA/RFE Items 14045/52 mf 16. Although this informant also stated that rewards of up to 1000 forints were possible for successfully identifying a potential troublemaker or "wrecker," no other sources report bounties of this type.

norm throughout communist Eastern Europe. One woman interviewed after 1956 articulated precisely this point in precisely these terms:

> The status of women is the worst someone can imagine. Their lives become very difficult because they have to carry a double burden. They have to go to work for 8 hours a day and they have to do their homemaking for 8 hours, and every woman who cares [even] a little bit for her family is a slave, working for 16 hours a day.[352]

Women's lives were made more difficult not only by this increase in labor, but also by the fact that they were identified with the regime's intrusive goals. Joanna Goven aptly sums up the social dimension of women's political activity:

> Women's participation in this work as MNDSz or party activists meant that women became publicly conspicuous simultaneously with, and as a dimension of, state intrusion into private life. Women, and particularly "emancipated" women, became associated with state intrusiveness, as if, with women's escape from the confines of the household, necessary and appropriate boundaries had broken down.[353]

In short, the unity apparent among wide segments of the populace in opposition to the regime's impositions did not transcend gender difference. In a very real sense—as the state's intrusive policies were carried out in factories and offices by female MNDSz agitators and *népnevelők*—women were blamed for communism's faults. The persistence of patriarchy in communist Hungary was also apparent in the regime's failure to eradicate prostitution and its nominal success in controlling women's reproduction, to which we now turn.

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[351] Corrin, "Introduction," p. 8.
[352] CUHRP Interview 123, Box 8, pp. 29-30.
[353] Goven, p. 87.

Policing Sexuality: Prostitution

Prior to communist rule, in Hungary as in many European countries, prostitution was regulated but not illegal.[354] Although religious leaders and health administrators railed against it on a regular basis, it also fulfilled an important function in maintaining patriarchal control over society. The bourgeois ideal of womanhood—chaste until marriage and monogamous thereafter—relied on the spectacle of its opposite, the "fallen woman," as a means of social control. As Jeffrey Weeks argues, "the familial ideology [of the nineteenth century] was accompanied by, and often relied on, a vast underbelly of prostitution, which fed on the double standard and an authoritarian moral code."[355] Nineteenth-century Hungary does not differ significantly from this broader European norm. According to the 1885 Statute on Brothels, prostitutes were required to register with the police and submit to twice-weekly medical examinations by a police doctor. By the early twentieth century, the detection of a sexually-transmitted disease in the course of a regular examination was grounds for forced admission to a hospital. Otherwise, registered prostitutes were free to operate in brothels and private residences licensed for that use. Streetwalking, on the other hand, constituted grounds for possible incarceration, of up to a month's duration for a first offense.[356] By tolerating a network of discreet brothels, the authorities accomplished a dual purpose: brothels concentrated the dangerous specter of female sexuality in spaces that were at once invisible to children and

[354] For prostitution in France, see Corbin, *Women for Hire*; on England, see Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*.
[355] Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society: the Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800* (New York: Longman, 1981), p. 30.
[356] Susan Zimmerman, "'Making a Living From Disgrace': The Politics of Prostitution, Female Poverty and Urban Gender Codes in Budapest and Vienna, 1860-1920," in *The City and Central Europe: Culture and Society from 1800 to the present* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

proper women, and perfectly transparent to their medical and police monitors (and, of course, customers).[357] In short, sex was for sale as long as it was kept discreet. In the bourgeois worldview, men paying women for sex was viewed as a natural and largely-unremarkable phenomenon; the important thing—to the authorities, anyway—was the maintenance of public order and the protection of the body social from sexually-transmitted diseases.

Conversely, unregistered or "covert" (*titkos*) prostitution was perceived as a threat to both of these modernist axioms. It was therefore subject to pervasive surveillance and draconian enforcement. Some of these "covert" prostitutes were doubtless actively plying the trade, either exclusively or alongside their day jobs. Others, however, were guilty only of dressing or behaving inappropriately in public. By the late nineteenth century, these notions of propriety were themselves in flux. With the onset of industrialization, more and more women entered the streets and public spaces—as prostitutes, certainly, but also as workers, shoppers, and charity workers. This increased female presence in previously male-coded public spaces occurred even as the normative dress code for females became racier: "looser-fitting, sportier and ever-shorter skirts" became *au courant*, and the corset was finally abandoned.[358] As in all European countries, the fin-de-siècle perception of prostitution was shaped by the myth of the "white slave trade," as the Budapest presses spewed salacious stories of innocent virgins sold into prostitution against their will to aghast-yet-titillated readers. Unlike their western European counterparts, significant numbers of Hungarian women actually ended

[357] On this point see Corbin, p. 9.

up in brothels in foreign lands.[359] All in all, for women the new freedom to move about the city unchaperoned was mitigated by the increased danger of harassment—from random men and also the police themselves, who by this time had created an entire department, the 'morality police,' to deal with morals and the maintenance of public decency.[360] Prostitution policy thus served as a means of patriarchal social control: "all those women whose behavior could not be reduced to the patterns of either the virgin or the faithful wife and mother were suspected of 'covert' prostitution,"[361] and the onus of proof was on them to prove otherwise.

After the first decade of the twentieth century, this basic scheme remained largely unaltered until World War II. The Statute on Brothels was significantly revised in 1909. While the status of registered prostitutes improved slightly—inasmuch as they were no longer forced to pay for their gynecological exams and they were no longer restricted to

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[358] László Kósa, editor, *A Cultural History of Hungary in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Budapest: Corvina, 2000), p. 39.

[359] Hungary occupies a peculiar place of prominence in the international history of the "white slave trade." Two of the first white slavery rings discovered (in 1867 and 1875) involved the transfer of women from Budapest to Buenos Aires (Donna J. Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, family, and nation in Argentina* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), p. 5), and by the end of the century Budapest was one of the two major markets on the Continent (Corbin, p. 286). Although the first international convention against white slavery was not held until 1875, the Hungarian government was actually the first in the world to draw attention to the phenomenon, in 1864 (Corbin, p. 277). The best analysis of the international moral panic incurred by the supposed traffic in white women are Sheila Jeffreys, *The Idea of Prostitution* (North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1997), pp. 7-34, and Corbin, pp. 277-298; see Walkowtiz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 81-134, for a detailed description of the tumult caused by the "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" in London. Although the white slave trade was far more moral panic than historical fact, we must note that—primarily as a function of contemporaneous trends in international emigration—women from Eastern Europe were much more likely to end up in foreign brothels than their Western European counterparts: of the 6413 prostitutes registered in Buenos Aires in the period 1889-1901, almost one-third were from Russia, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, or Romania (Corbin, p. 287).

[360] On this point see Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, especially pp. 41-80.

brothels—covert prostitutes could now be registered against their will and forced to submit to the regular examinations.[362] Moreover, places of entertainment were now licensed and monitored by the police, and unlicensed prostitutes were not allowed to enter them. At this point, as Zimmerman argues, "the police had, in fact, acquired a legal right that could, in principle, be applied to any woman:"[363] to women actually guilty of taking money for sex, but also to any woman who deliberately or inadvertently transgressed the bourgeois visual and behavioral codes of propriety and chastity. This bipolar praxis—the regulation of registered prostitutes, and the surveillance and persecution of covert ones—continued largely unchanged throughout the interwar period. Prostitution flourished in the utter economic devastation and poverty following World War II: according to the Budapest chief of police, more than 10,000 unregistered women were plying the trade in the immediate postwar period.[364]

The communist regime did not immediately move against this institutionalized prostitution scheme upon seizing power, but change was not far behind. In the 1 May

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[361] Zimmerman cites a passage from Kornél Tábori and Vladimir Székely's 1908 publication *Erkölcstelen Budapest* [Immoral Budapest] to this effect: "In Pest one sees a whole army of women housemaids, needlewomen, and female teachers roaming about, always eager to have this or that kind of adventure. They accompany you where you wish for some money, perhaps a supper, a week-end excursion or even a couple of warm words. Some of them begin to deal directly in prostitution; the majority however looks at these adventures as a source of entertainment and satisfaction only." Zimmerman, p. 179.

[362] The number of Hungarian women forced to register as prostitutes is unknown. In France, where prostitution was regulated in a similar manner, fully 73% of these registrations were involuntary. Corbin, p. 33.

[363] Zimmerman, p. 187. The same patriarchal function of prostitution policy acting as a behavioral regulator on all women occurred in France at this time. Corbin labels this the "hyperregulationist" moment, and describes its effects thus: "Unregistered prostitution, if people were not careful, would run the risk of spreading erotic behavior throughout the social body as a whole. Fears concerning the sexual integrity of bourgeois women were of utmost concern to the regulationists of 'the moral order.' This explains the emergence of that hyperregulationism whose avowed aim was to supervise not only registered or unregistered prostitution but all extramarital sexual activities. It was the logical culmination of the regulationist project." Corbin, p. 24.

[364] Pető, "Átvonuló hadsereg," p. 95.

1948 edition of *Magyar Rendőr*, The police doctor Dr. István Bálint summarized the legal administration's obligation: "The goal of police supervision is to keep prostitutes, and the brothels (*bordélyházak)* they live in, in line with the protection of morals and health." For Bálint, the greatest danger posed by prostitutes was the transmission of sexually-transmitted diseases. He asserted that the regular examinations for registered prostitutes are an effective inhibitor, and that covert prostitution was the main culprit in the spread of venereal diseases. Bálint drew attention to the socioeconomic effects of prostitution, arguing that it endangers not only the individual (in the form of debilitation and possibly an early death) but also the economy, in the form of "lessened worker capacity" (*csökkent munkákepesség*) and lost workdays. Bálint also linked this form of female deviance with other transgressive behaviors, noting that prostitutes tended to congregate in the same places as burglars, pickpockets, fences and smugglers. This explains his admonition to his police readership:

> Accordingly, when the big-city cop on the beat ends up in those parts of the city frequented by prostitutes, he must do so with open eyes and attentive ears, as here he may have come closer to the underworld of the criminals, and might spy criminals of rather greater importance.

In closing, Bálint stated that prostitution had been eradicated in the Soviet Union (a dubious assertion at best), declaimed that "this type of lifestyle is unknown in a healthy workers' society," and called for its criminalization.[365] Not surprisingly, prostitution was banned shortly after Bálint's article appeared. Thousands of women were rounded up by

[365] "Bűnügyi lélektan: prostitució," *Magyar Rendőr*, 1 May 1948.

the police in raids on bars, nightclubs, and clandestine meeting places (*titkos találkahelyek*). The fates of these women were mixed. Some of these women were indeed retrained as taxi drivers and in other occupations, but these were the lucky ones. Most women arrested for prostitution were jailed or sent off to forced-labor projects in Sztálinváros and other sites of socialist construction.[366] Although this crackdown on prostitution signaled a significant shift from the pre-communist praxis, at least one element remained the same: there is no record of pimps or procurers being prosecuted in like manner.

As the police and courts turned up the heat on prostitution, the communist presses matched this persecution with heightened invective. In his October 1951 *Magyar Rendőr* article, Tivadar Vértes both reiterated and elaborated upon the themes introduced by Dr. Bálint three years prior. Unlike Bálint, Vértes made no mention of prostitution's perennial presence in western civilization. He instead described it as a specifically bourgeois and capitalist phenomenon. Vértes concurred that the major danger posed by prostitution is that of sexually-transmitted disease, that prostitutes often run around with other criminals, and that it diverts "a countless number" of men from productive work, bu then went on to list a number of its other pernicious aspects as well. Prostitution also "debauches the morals of society" and, worst of all, it "endangers our most precious treasure—our children." He declaimed the need for a more ambitious program of training and educating prostitutes for productive work, but also averred that those women who were unwilling or unable to leave "the debauched lifestyle of the capitalist world"

[366] Volgyes, "Social Deviance," pp. 38, 39, OSA/RFE 6418/51 mf 3, OSA/RFE Items 321/51 mf 1, OSA/RFE Items 598/51 mf 1, OSA/RFE Items 8358/51 mf 4.

were to be locked up "in such a place that their moral contagion is unable to harm our society."[367] Vértes' invective is representative of the regime's new stance on prostitution. The activities of the morals police—which continued in communist Hungary as an organization separate from the regular police—also modulated into a higher pitch.

By early 1952, about 350 women per month were being arrested for prostitution, and the Budapest police raided "clandestine meeting-places" about three times per week on average. Women of bourgeois, or *deklasszalt*, origin were arrested for prostitution in numbers disproportionate to their presence in society, accounting for one third to almost one half of those brought to trial.[368] These women were doubly-damned by their class origin: they were both less likely to have obtained viable jobs after 1948 and thus more likely to have resorted to prostitution, and they were much more likely to be detained and charged in police sweeps than their working-class counterparts. Not surprisingly, these underlying socioeconomic and political factors were elided in the official transcript. According to the March 1952 report on police activity in Budapest, "the activities of the morals police demonstrates the intensification of the class struggle, as of the [370] prostitutes arrested, 157 were of the *deklasszalt* or capitalist element."[369] Sentences for prostitution were stiff: in September 1953, sentencing guidelines dictated 6 months to up

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[367] "Harc a prostitúció ellen," *Magyar Rendőr*, Vol. 5 No. 36, 27 October 1951.

[368] Budapest Fővarosi Leveltár XXXV. 95. e / 107 ő.e., "A bpi rendőrkapitanság március havi szakmai munkájáról jelentés," 24 April 1951, p. 4, "A bpi rendőrkapitanság április havi szakmai munkájáról jelentés," 30 May 1952, p. 4.

[369] BFL XXXV. 95. e / 107 ő.e., "A bpi rendőrkapitanság május havi szakmai munkájáról jelentés," 13 June 1952, p. 4.

to 3 years in prison.[370] A representative sentence from early 1954 was 6 months in prison and 3 years internal exile; by late 1954, the Budapest police had resolved to expel all known prostitutes (as well as pickpockets) from the city.[371]

This latter precaution was probably in response to what a September 1953 police memorandum termed a "blossoming anew" of prostitution in the wake of the New Course. Although 397 prostitutes had been arrested that month, the report averred that this was certainly only a fraction of the total number of women engaged in this behavior. This memorandum also noted that despite the fact that the majority of these women worked in factories during the day, the factory-based DISz and trade unions were doing nothing to reeducate them or monitor their behavior. It closed with a request for information from the trade unions on prostitute activity in the workplace and suggestions on what political methods to use in "the battle against prostitution."[372] The responses it received were not useful.

The report from the chemical workers' union revealed that several ex-prostitutes had found work in the factories after their release from prison, but they did not stay long:

> Today only one or two such women still work in the factories.… thirteen ex-prostitutes started at the Kőbanya pharmaceutical factory [when the brothels were shut down], but every one of them stayed there only a short while.… They had a bad attitude towards work and work discipline. They did not behave appropriately in the workplace. They behaved and dressed conspicuously, drawing attention from their fellow workers with bawdy language ….

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[370] Note that this is even after the advent of the New Course, when the penalties for most crimes were reduced. *Magyar Rendőr*, 19 September 1953.
[371] *Esti Budapest*, 9 January 1954, BFL XXXV. 95. e / 107 ő.e., "Intézkedési terv a Főváros őszi közbiztonsági helyzetének megjavitására," 15 September 1954.
[372] BFL XXXV. 95. e. / 107 ő.e., Memorandum to N.J.né (no title), 24 September 1953.

> At the Budapest oxygen plant, four such women found jobs. They also had a bad attitude towards work discipline, and every one of them quit after a short time. Of the 7 women who found positions at the Csepel mineral oil plant after the closure of the brothels, 6 left of their own accord. One of them, Sz.F., still works there; she finishes her work punctually, and also demonstrates good work discipline. She is a rare exception.[373]

A common refrain in this report is that even while these ex-prostitutes worked at these factories, they often carried on their prior occupation at night (*az esti órákban tovább folytatni az előző foglalkozását*). The consensus among the surveyed factory managers and personnel department heads was that in all likelihood there were still such women in the workforce, but they had no hard evidence to this effect.

The union tasked with monitoring workers in the service industries didn't even attempt to address the question of how many women might be working as prostitutes. It instead provided a list of suggestions for how the authorities might keep track of prostitutes in general. They suggested that the records of "particular women" who had rented flats in the immediate wake of the brothel closure should be reexamined: those that didn't work and weren't married should be forced to explain their means of support. The morals police should supervise the public parks, certain cafés and other nightspots, and the workers' hostels. The recommended means for ferreting out "covert prostitutes" in their homes goes into particular detail:

[373] BFL XXXV. 95. e. / 107 ő.e., "Jelentés az ipari üzemekben elhelyezkedett volt prostituált nőkről," 12 October 1953.

> If this issue is to be cleared up in its entirety, an important assignment is to check the apartment-block- and district-level inhabitant records of women residents, as these indicate whether they are married or single [*hajadon*] in addition to where they work, and if single, who provides for them. This could also be accomplished by the superintendents [*házfelügyelők*], because they know the inhabitants and the tenants. From these records it will be possible to determine which women don't have jobs, aren't married, and don't have anyone providing for them. In this manner we would be able to get a clear picture of the district.[374]

The administrator in charge of responding to the directive summed up both documents. Noting that the factory management hadn't the faintest idea of the presence or the degree of prostitute activity in the workplace, and that for the most part prostitutes worked in places the trade unions couldn't effectively reach, she concluded that she was unable to recommend any political methods for educating these women.[375]

This spate of reports and memoranda reveals significant elements of how communist prostitution policy regressed to patriarchal norms in its control of women's sexual activity. Whereas the MNDSz women described above were judged primarily on the basis of their achievements, the dress, behavior, and language of the ex-prostitutes was central to their representation in the official transcript. That they also were depicted as undisciplined and indolent workers should come as no surprise: although Sz. F. was able to redeem herself through work, she was a rare exception—of all the factories surveyed, she was the *only* ex-prostitute who was found still working in the same factory

[374] BFL XXXV. 95. e. / 107 ő.e., Memorandum to N. J.né, 15 October 1953. Note that the Hungarian word *hajadon* also denotes 'virgin' and 'maiden,' as well as 'spinster.'
[375] BFL XXXV. 95. e. / 107 ő.e., Memorandum to K., n.d., p. 2.

in 1953.[376] Those women deemed especially worthy of surveillance were those working in low-income jobs (charwomen, attendants, etc.), as taxi-drivers, and in cafés and nightclubs.[377] Women moving from the countryside to work in the factories were also thought to be in particular danger of falling into disgrace.[378] Above all, women who appeared on the books as single or jobless were to be monitored most closely. The parallel with the socialist state's bourgeois predecessor is clear: those women who failed to live up to the normative standards of dress and behavior were those who found their sexual activity most closely monitored. The major difference, of course, was that even after the advent of the New Course the brothels remained closed: socialist patriarchy had inadvertently divested itself of a proven means of controlling unruly female bodies. As monitoring sexual behavior was difficult in the factories, the administration turned its regulatory gaze to the streets and parks, to the bars and coffeehouses, and, most intrusively, into the residences of single women.

A number of the émigrés interviewed after 1956 were cognizant of both the regime's stated intent to eradicate prostitution and its relative inefficiency in accomplishing this goal. Many of them were able to name specific sites of prostitute activity: the "Three Hussars" Inn and the Ilkovics restaurant by the Western Railroad

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[376] BFL XXXV. 95. e. / 107 ő.e., "Jelentés az ipari üzemekben elhelyezkedett volt prostituált nőkről," 12 October 1953. In addition to the specific factories mentioned in this report, N.J.né also received reports from the Budapest offices of the textile, ironworks, and postal unions.

[377] BFL XXXV. 95. e. / 107 ő.e., Memorandum to N. J.né, 15 October 1953. One woman's guarded account of her job in a café is suggestive of how the service industry might be conducive to a life of casual prostitution: "During the last five years I worked in a small restaurant. It was a kind of meeting place for dates. We served food and drinks…. I was a waitress but I had to keep company as well, so that the guests would drink more and thereby we would reach the prescribed norm…. Frequently, we also had a pianist and while he was playing we could charge twice the price for everything. I made good money …. No, I don't think I was exploited. I would rather say that this time I exploited the Communists." She also stated that she generally made 5000 forints per month, which seems very high. CUHRP Interview 126, Box 8, pp. 10, 15.

Station in Budapest, a number of establishments in Berkocsis street, and so forth.[379] According to one young student from Debrecen,

> The Communists tried to be severe and punished prostitution, however, without any real results. The police could not do anything. In Debrecen the students knew exactly the houses of prostitution and tried all of them. I have no experience from Budapest.[380]

Another interviewee recalled "Yes, a secret prostitution survived with the effect that the authorities lost any control over it, since officially prostitution did not exist any more."[381] Another 1956 émigré, this one an engineer from Budapest, concurred:

> There was no officially recognized or tolerated prostitution. It continued nevertheless in places and under circumstances that were beyond the limits of effective control of the authorities.[382]

One young male interviewee demonstrated a degree of sympathy for the plight of young women trying to live on limited incomes:

> [T]here was a great deal of prostitution, especially in town. The fact that the houses of prostitution were illegal contributed to this, because prostitution was forced out into the streets. Often financial difficulties led women to this, and possibly loneliness and the fact that they were far away from their families.

He was the exception. Most male (and some female) respondents articulated the common patriarchal double standard: that prostitution is a natural element of society, and that

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[378] BFL XXXV. 95. e. / 107 ő.e., Memorandum to N.J.né, 24 September 1953.
[379] CUHRP Interview 154, Box 10, p. 37.
[380] CUHRP Interview 228, Box 12, p. 39.
[381] CUHRP Interview 137, Box 9, pp. 47-48.
[382] CUHRP Interview 127, Box 8, p. 43.

prostitutes (not their customers) were lacking in moral character. Some of the respondents even openly articulated the patriarchal backlash against communist rule by associating "socialist women" with ex-prostitutes: "many former streetwalkers got Party offices," and "Those women, who were engaged in that kind of business, mostly became members of the police force."[383]

These stereotypes obscure the reality of women's sex work today much as they did in the 1950s. It is impossible to state with any certainty the actual motivations or intentions of those women who were labeled prostitutes by the regime. Some of them were certainly selling sex for money. However, the broader social and cultural context of sexual behavior in communist Hungary suggests a number of other alternatives. Many accounts of life under communism recounted a severe lapse in morals in the 1950s, which begs interpretation in at least two different ways.[384] Some women were doubtless experimenting with the same degree of sexual freedom men had always enjoyed:

> It seems that they [the regime] are stricter about sexual matters, but in reality sexual life became much looser. In villages the youth is watched very carefully, and since the blame was laid on the girl, girls are reserved. The same could be observed among college girls, with a very few exceptions. …It was different, however, with the working class. Girls have received complete equality, in life as well as jobs. They moved and behaved as free and independent women if they went to work. Since most of the women had jobs, it happened very frequently that they were involved with one of their colleagues. The opportunity, and sometimes the desire to keep a job, resulted in a loosening of sexual morality.[385]

[383] CUHRP Interview 208, Box11, p. 36, CUHRP Interview 132, Box 9, p. 22.
[384] I discuss this moral panic over morals at greater length in Chapter 4.
[385] CUHRP Interview 137, Box 9, p. 48.

However, as her closing remark indicates, women might also be forced to respond to unwanted sexual advances if they wanted to stay employed. Secondly, as with the abolition of the corset at the turn of the century, notions of what constituted proper dress doubtless affected both popular and administrative perceptions of female sexuality and immorality. Like the émigré who found herself officially labeled a cosmopolitan deviant for wearing pink lipstick, many other sources also recounted the strict, and dull, dress code of the stalinist period.[386] The New Course ushered in significant change in this regard as well:

> [T]here were changes in 1953. It was allowed to play chess even though Western dances were still forbidden. Women were allowed to wear hats, nail polish and they could wear even high-heeled shoes which were not permitted before.[387]

This relaxation of implicit sartorial controls coincided with the administrative perception of an increase in prostitute activity, and incidentally with the 'joke' at the start of this chapter: it seems that the New Course was significant in this regard as well. Throughout the entire period, however, overdressed (by regime-normative standards) women were more likely to run afoul of the morals police. Both the actual behavior and the motivations and intentions of those women labeled prostitutes by the regime remain opaque. Regardless, even as these preexisting patriarchal biases replicated themselves in their new, communist context, prostitution continued under communism much as it had prior to 1948.

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[386] See, e.g., Tamas Aczel and Tibor Meray, *The Revolt of the Mind: A case Study of Intellectual Resistance Behind the Iron Curtain* (New York: Praeger, 1959, p. 130, CUHRP Interview 252, Box 13, pp. 3-4, OSA/RFE Items 8245/51, mf 3, OSA/RFE Items 3213/54, mf 37, and OSA/RFE Items 7341/55, mf 57.
[387] CUHRP Interview 134, Box , p. 138.

In the relaxed atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s, it became even more widespread. Surveying the Hungarian flesh trade in 1977, Ivan Volgyes argued that "the prevalence and survival of working class prostitution … seems to indicate that this activity fulfills a functional social need and a socially acceptable role among the working class."[388] The "functionalism" and acceptability Volgyes identified was the perpetuation of the Janus-faced, patriarchal moral and sexual norm: one that remained alive and well under communism as it had been under its bourgeois predecessor. Unable to eradicate prostitution, the regime and its representatives instead opted to rail against it on a regular basis, and to intermittently prosecute its practitioners, rather than address the deeper social causes at work—especially when many of these underlying causes, such as widespread social dislocation and poverty among working women, were the effects of the regime's own modernizing drive. The net result, by 1956 at the latest, was that prostitution became normalized under communism much as it had been under the prewar regime. After an initial surge of regulatory ambition, the communist regime's prostitution policy rapidly came to resemble its bourgeois predecessor. The same was true on the abortion front, where a workable symbiosis between the administration and patriarchal authority is apparent as early as 1953.

Policing Reproduction: Illegal Abortion

The real historical anomaly that begs explanation is not why abortion was criminalized in the 1950s, but why it had been previously decriminalized at all. In Hungary, as throughout Europe, abortion was illegal before World War II. Its supposed

[388] Volgyes, "Social Deviance," p. 42.

sinful nature—in the eyes of the predominantly-Catholic Magyars—was exacerbated by underlying concerns about national reproduction. In Hungary, the debate on population policy and reproductive rights had begun well before the Rákosi regime consolidated power in 1948. By the 1880s, the isolated peasant practice of *egyke*, or limiting the family to one (preferably male) child, had initiated a debate among academics and clergymen. Inheritance practices had never been standardized throughout Hungary, and in many regions partible inheritance was the norm. In poorer regions such as Transdanubia, splitting the familial lands after the death of a patriarch could spell economic doom for the entire family. As acquiring more land was generally not an option, many peasant families chose to limit reproduction instead. Although abortion had been made illegal in 1878, the enforcement of this ban in the villages was practically impossible, and midwives continued to dispense abortifacients and also perform abortions well into the twentieth century.[389]

After the severe casualties incurred during World War I and the massive population and territorial losses suffered at Trianon—and in the face of the steadily-declining Magyar birthrate—the *egyke* debate surfaced anew. Albeit perhaps overstated, Steven Béla Várdy's assertion "the shock of Trianon was so pervasive and so keenly felt that the syndrome it produced can only be compared to a malignant national disease"[390] evokes its profound impact—and explains the heightened invective provoked by the single-child family issue. Coupled with longer-*durée* concerns about national

[389] Ildikó Vasary, "The Sin of Transdanubia: The One-Child System in Rural Hungary," *Continuity and Change* 4 (1989), pp. 429-468.

extinction,[391] the "Trianon complex" exacerbated *egyke*'s semiotic threat to the nation's well-being in the popular imagination. Despite the fact that *egyke* was practiced in less than 8% of villages in Hungary, the spectacle of these Hungarian women choosing not to reproduce—when the nation was in crisis—provoked a outcry from the religious and intellectual communities. In the period 1920 to 1940, more than 280 different books, pamphlets, and articles decried the pallor *egyke* cast over the future of the Hungarian nation.[392] Depending on the political stance of the writer, the one-child family signified the need for land reform, the dangers of increasing secularization and women's emancipation, or the pernicious effects of stagnant tradition in general. Despite this heightened attention from the press, steadily-increasing surveillance by the state, and the spread of modern medical practices and personnel into rural areas, abortion was still widely practiced throughout the interwar period.[393]

Abortion was briefly decriminalized in 1945. Although this was probably at least partially due to the general spirit of democratization that swept Hungary in the immediate postwar years, it was primarily an emergency measure to cope with the hundreds of thousands of rapes of Hungarian women by Soviet soldiers during the 1944-45

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[390] Steven Béla Várdy, "The Impact of Trianon on the Hungarian Mind: Irredentism and Hungary's Path to War," in *Hungary in the Age of Total War 1938-1948*, edited by N. F.Dreisziger (Bradenton: East European Monographs, 1998).

[391] Tibor Frank, "The Secret of Survival," in *Hungarian Arts and Sciences 1848-2000*, edited by Laszlo and Nora Somlyody (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 2003), p. 9.

[392] Vasary, "The Sin of Transdanubia," p. 431.

[393] See Béla Bodó, *Tiszazug: A Social History of a Murder Epidemic* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2002), Bodó, "Progress or National Suicide: the Single-Child Family in Hungarian Political Thought, 1840-1945," *Hungarian Studies Review* Vol. XXVIII Nos. 1-2 (2001), pp. 185-208, and Ildikó Vasary, "The Sin of Transdanubia."

invasion.[394] In any case, after 1945 women were able to get abortions free of charge, in proper health care facilities, as long as they received authorization from a medical officer. Significantly, this liberalization of abortion policy was not codified in law, as this would have caused a rift in the fragile postwar coalition between the Social Democrats and the social conservatives in the Smallholders' Party. It was instead instituted by a decree from the Ministry of Health, and not widely publicized. [395] The 1878 abortion law remained on the books, providing a fig leaf for popular sentiment—and, presently, for the realignment of population policy along communist lines.

After an initial postwar boom the birthrate began a steady decline. More women working translated to fewer babies born. The party leadership became concerned. From 1950, Minister of Health Anna Ratkó preached an extensive anti-abortion campaign with a backup choir of doctors and health officials; illegal abortion (*magzatelhajtás*) was prosecuted with increasing fervor and severity.[396] Signs proclaiming "For girls it is an honor to have children, for women their duty" ("*Lánynak szülni dicsőség - asszonynak szülni kötelesség*") were hung in hospitals, factories, and other public spaces.[397] Local law enforcement and health administration officials reacted accordingly. *Magzatelhajtás* arrests increased steadily from 1950 on. Matters came to a head in mid-1952. In

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[394] The actual number is impossible to determine; even today in the USA almost half of all rapes go unreported. Pető suggests a figure between 50,000 and 200,000; one 1956 émigré put the number much higher, at 340,000 (CUHRP Interview 227, Box 12, p. 1). See Andrea Pető, "Átvonuló hadsereg, maradandó trauma," for the best (and, to date, the only) analysis of this tragic and under-researched aspect of the Red Army's occupation of Budapest.

[395] Pető, "Women's Rights," pp. 51-52.

[396] Pető, "Women's Rights," pp. 51-53.

[397] The signs were probably first put up in 1950; they first come to the attention of RFE interviewers in mid-1951. OSA/RFE Items 4808/51 mf 2. Many of the CUHRP émigrés recalled them in 1957, without any prompting by their interviewer: see, e.g., CUHRP Interview 103, Box 7, p. 33, CUHRP Interview 120, Box 8, p. 43, CUHRP Interview 121, Box 8, p. 24, and CUHRP Interview 133, Box 9, p. 53.

February, the abortion question had first been broached in a Central Committee meeting, and the minutes from the 14 March meeting indicate that Rákosi was preoccupied with the issue and concerned with the declining birthrate.[398] Previously, on 4 March, Ratkó had instructed the Ministry of Justice to find a few appropriate cases for a show trial.[399] The trials described below were selected sometime during in the summer and the sentences were decided by 24 July, when the results of Rátko's search were reported back to the Central Committee. The judicial apparatus received the go-ahead for the actual trials on 14 August, and they were performed on 2 and 4 September.[400] The evidence presented in these trials reveals much about the practice, nature, and extent of the underground abortion network.

The first trial found two abortion doctors and three of their ex-patients before the court. Both of the doctors confessed to having performed several abortions since 1945, always in their offices and with sterile instruments. Although the doctors averred that they usually charged between 200 and 300 forints for their services, other witnesses testified to fees as high as 500 or 600 forints; Dr. L.M. may have charged as much as 850 forints for one of his last abortions, in March. (Both doctors made around 2000 forints per month in their legal occupations.) Similarly, the precise number of abortions performed by both men is indeterminate. Although L.M. testified at the show trial to having performed 14 or 15 operations between January and July of 1952, he had

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[398] Jobbágyi, "Az abortuszkérdés a pártiratokban: 1950-1981," *Válóság* 5 (1991), pp. 54-57.
[399] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Eü) / 7 ő.e., p. 4.
[400] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Eü) / 7 ő.e., p. 6 and pp. 7-8. For some reason, the third trial suggested by the Justice Ministry—that of Dr. K.S., who allegedly charged as much as 1000 forints for some abortions—was not selected to fill out the bill of show trials.

previously confessed to 22 in that same period. The case summary in the Justice Ministry's internal documents puts the number at 25, while the midwife who had assisted him testified to 70 or 80 abortions.[401] Both men were sentenced to seven years and six months in prison, a 10,000-forint fine, a 10-year ban from public affairs (*közügyektől eltiltás*), and a lifetime prohibition from practicing medicine. The women involved drew much lighter sentences: 1 year each for K.F. and G. V., ten months for A.M., and three years' prohibition from public affairs for all three.[402]

The abortion providers in the second case had committed much more sensational crimes. Neither was actually a doctor, although one had some medical training. They had consistently performed abortions as a team. Unlike the doctors in the first case, they had done so on plastic sheets in private residences and via glucose injection. This method often incurred severe hemorrhaging: indeed, their arrest was due to one such incident, in which one of their patients started bleeding so heavily they rushed her to the hospital and were arrested as a consequence. On a few occasions when the pregnancy was too far advanced for the injection method to be effective, they had resorted to infanticide, initiating childbirth prematurely and then killing the newborn baby. They charged around 400 forints per operation. The leader of this group drew a 10-year sentence; the women in this latter case who had aided in the infanticides drew sentences of 3-4 years each; the women who had been operated on, less than a year each.[403]

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[401] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Eü) / 7 ő.e., p. 6.
[402] BFL XXV. 4a. B. II. 4897/1952.
[403] BFL XXV. 4a. B. II. 3632/1952.

Given the regime's intent to make examples of these men and women, their class origins and personal histories were largely irrelevant—except to condemn them all the further where they were disadvantageous. One of the female defendants in the latter case, M.G., was the *deklasszalt* scion of a Jewish family that owned one of the major industries in Budapest until its nationalization in World War II. The leader of the second group put on trial, G. I., was an ex-Arrow Cross member. Although these dubious pasts were not stressed at the trial, they were the defining characteristics of these defendants as they were portrayed in the confidential 14 August memo.[404] Possible mitigating circumstances—most notably Dr. L. M.'s demonstrated past devotion to the revolutionary cause (he had joined the Red Army of Béla Kun's short-lived Hungarian Socialist Republic in 1919, was captured by the Romanian Army, and spent time in a Romanian jail as a result)[405]—counted for naught in the eyes of the court.

Over and above the fates of these individual defendants, the trials also reveal the covert and extensive contours of the underground abortion industry. The abortion network operated entirely via word-of-mouth. In both trials, the women involved had learned where to go for abortions from other women, or (in the second case) the male accomplices were able to seek out the abortion providers with minimal effort. In the first trial, one of the doctors had repeatedly referred women seeking abortions to the other. The brief biographies included in the court records demonstrate two more characteristics of these informal networks. Whereas illegal abortion networks in the countryside remained strictly circumscribed to a few villages at most, the urban networks that surface

[404] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Eü) / 7 ő.e., p. 6.

in these trials were not limited by neighborhoods or even cities. Women came from all over Budapest to these abortion providers. In the latter trial, two of the clients came from as far away as Tatabanya (62 km) and Balatonfűzfő (105 km). While it was never easy to get an abortion, it does not seem that distance or surveillance proved insurmountable.

A major issue in obtaining an abortion may have been not the state's attempts to control reproduction, but affordability. The women on trial on 4 September 1952 made an average of 720 forints per month.[406] By mid-1952, the usual cost of an abortion in Budapest was 400 or 500 forints. (Abortions were somewhat cheaper in the smaller cities: as late as 1956, the operation cost as little as 250 forints in Sztálinváros.)[407] The price of an abortion was similarly prohibitive in a separate case dating from March 1953. Dr. H.B. had provided abortions for 27-year old B.I. in March 1952 and then again in November, charging her 500 forints the first time and 600 the second. (Dr. H.B. received a sentence of 6 years in prison; B.I., 7 months in prison and a 400-forint fine).[408] During his trial, Dr. L. M. testified that he charged poorer women as little as 150 forints, and in some cases he went through with the operation even when he knew he wouldn't get paid.[409] This was an expensive procedure for women living on or below the poverty line. For those women who were unable to procure abortions, this may have been due as much to poverty as it was statist intervention and surveillance.

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[405] Indeed, this might have actually worked against him—Mevius argues convincingly that the 1919ers were perceived as a threat by the Muscovite element in the MDP. Mevius, *Agents of Moscow*, pp. 69-86.
[406] BFL XXV. 4a. B. II. 3632/1952, pp 37-38.
[407] Sándor Horváth, "Gyermekvállalás, abortusz, születésszabályozás Sztálinvárosban," in *Fons*, Volume 3 (2001).
[408] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) / 17 ő.e., p. 17.
[409] BFL XXV. 4a. B. II. 4897/1952, pp. 44-45.

Lastly, the trials indicate the absence of alternatives to abortion. Contraceptives had been available (albeit not displayed in pharmacy windows nor advertised) before the war, but a January 1949 resolution by the National Health Council made a prescription necessary to obtain them, and restricted these to women who could demonstrate medical need.[410] None of the women in these trials indicated that they had ever used any barrier or chemical contraceptive means. The youngest of the three women on trial, 27-year old K.F., had already had two abortions before the one for which she was arrested.[411] Denied any alternatives, for these women abortion was their primary means of regulating reproduction.

The trials demonstrated—as they were intended to—the increasing fervor of the regime's pronatalist campaign, which kicked into high gear in late 1952 and early 1953. One Health Ministry pamphlet from early 1953 declared that one in four pregnancies were aborted. It went on to state that 70-80,000 abortions were performed each year, and it clearly delineated their antisocial nature: had these women instead chosen to carry those children to term, the result would have been enough children to populate an industrial town.[412] In August 1952, the Health Ministry secretly rescinded the "permissive" 1945 decree—still, as yet, without publicizing this change in reproductive policy—and spelled out the new abortion law. Although abortion was not made entirely illegal, any woman desiring an abortion had to plead her case before a committee. A second committee was also established, for appeal cases. Medical training was not

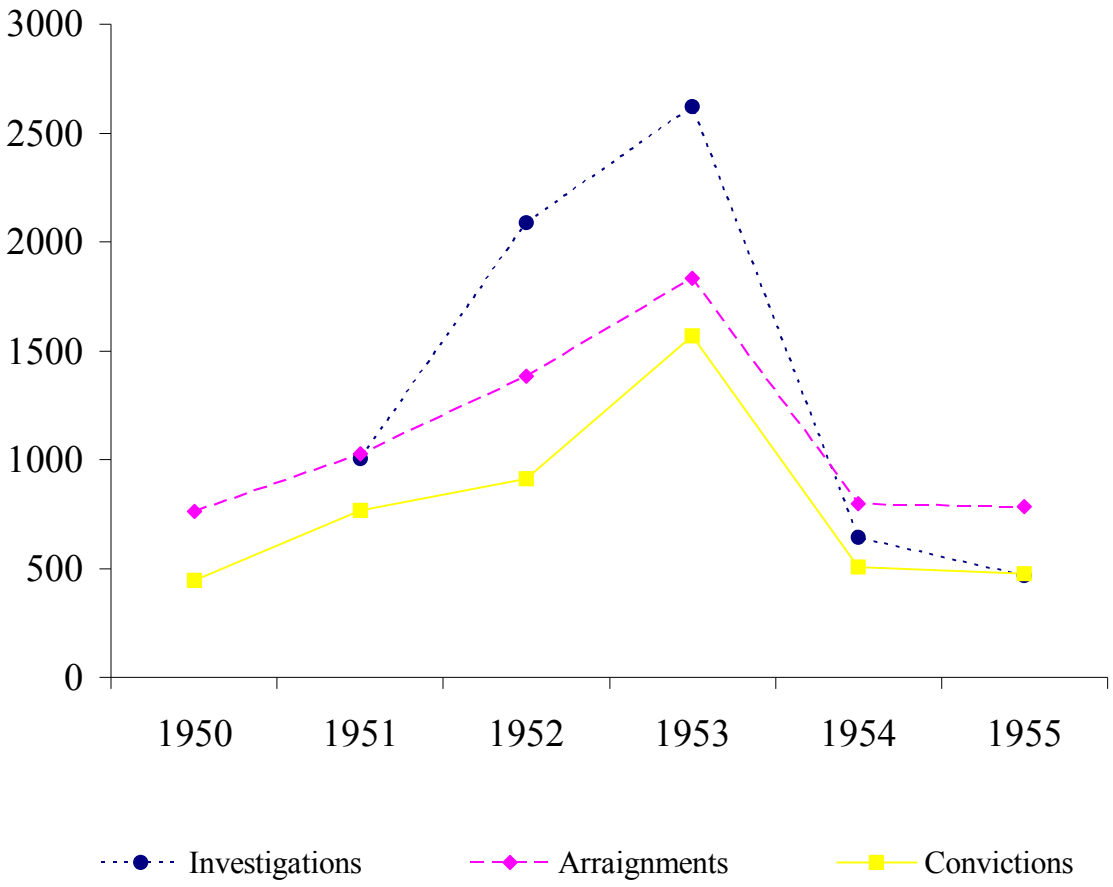
[410] MOL XIX-C-19. 15. d., cited in Pető, "Women's Rights," p. 55.
[411] BFL XXV. 4a. B. II. 4897/1952, p. 22.
[412] Cited in OSA/RFE Items 1700/53, mf 19.

required of the men and women who served on these committees; in rural areas especially, where the woman seeking the abortion was forced to appear before members of her local community, these abortion committees operated as powerful social sanctions. The show trials, heightened propaganda, and the revision of the law in secret all antedated the official reformulation of regime abortion policy.

In February 1953, the Decree for the Protection of Women and Children (or *Hatarozat az Anya- és Gyermekvédelem továbbfejlesztéséről*, hereafter HAGV) finally articulated the above abortion policy in the public transcript. Significantly, it also provided various incentives for women to have children.[413] It provided immediate payouts on birth for all mothers, and graduated incomes for mothers of large families. Six or more children earned the mother special recognition; 7 or more children earned added cash bonuses. The HAGV also required those individuals age 18 or older—male and female alike—who chose to remain childless to pay a childlessness tax (*gyermektelen adót*). It seems likely that Rákosi, Ratkó, and the other party officials concerned with the issue finally realized that incentives might be a necessary complement to prosecution. Signficantly, the finale version of the pronatalist policy had barely been put to the test when the New Course was inaugurated. The regime's obvious intent to crack down on *magzatelhajtás* was derailed by the general decrease in the prosecution of all crimes after mid-1953.

[413] see *Magyar Közlöny* [Hungarian Gazetteer], 8 February 1953, for the text of the law.

Chart 3.1 *Magzatelhajtás* Investigations, Trials, and Convictions, 1950-1955[414]



From 1950 to 1955, 6588 people were tried in connection with illegal abortion; 4676 of them were found guilty.[415] In 1952 alone, there were 1386 convictions for illegal abortions. Of them, 894 were sentenced to prison terms varying in duration from six

[414] Investigation data are from MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (F) / 70 ő.e., p. 314a; unfortunately, this report did not indicate the number of investigations for 1950. Trial and conviction data are from the Office of the Chief Prosecutor, MOL XX-10, cited in Pető, "Women's Rights," p. 75.

[415] Pető, "Women's Rights," p. 75. See Tibor Valuch, *Magyarország társadalomtörténete a XX. század második felében* (Budapest: Osiris, 2001), p. 34, for live birth and abortion rates throughout the period of communist rule.

months or less to more than ten years in prison. In January 1953, at the peak of the crackdown, 217 persons were convicted for *magzatelhajtás*-related crimes: in addition to the 113 women caught having abortions, 5 doctors, 16 nurses, 40 uncertified practitioners, and 43 accomplices (in either procurement or the operation itself) were also convicted. In general, doctors found guilty of performing abortions received sentences of 5-10 years in prison, unlicensed practitioners received 5-7 years, and nurses 2-5 year sentences. The women themselves received sentences of 2-8 months in prison on average, while accomplices' sentences were generally less than one year. Hefty fines accompanied all these prison sentences.[416] This hardline approach remained in effect until early 1953, but then *magzatelhajtás* prosecutions—as with most other crimes—dropped off steadily after Nagy came to power in June 1953.

The number of *magzatelhajtás* trials peaked in early 1953. Whereas around 894 people were sentenced in all of 1952 in connection with illegal abortion, 1387 were brought to trial—and 965 of them received sentences—in the first half of 1953 alone.[417] However, in the second half of 1953, only 453 new cases were initiated. In this same period, *magzatelhajtás* convictions drop by 342%. Illegal abortion convictions dropped a further 221% in the first half of 1954. As was the case with other crimes at the advent of the New Course, there was also a spate of acquittals and cases that were simply dropped by the court: more illegal abortion cases were dismissed in the third quarter of 1953 than

[416] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Eü) / 3 ő.e., pp. 410, 413, 414.
[417] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Eü) / 18 ő.e., p. 338.

the entire first half of the year.[418] As early as the summer of 1953, the regime had backed off on prosecuting *magzatelhajtás*. Then, on 1 January 1954, "abortions for reasons of social difficulties" were allowed.[419] In this more tolerant environment, the number of abortions reported to the health ministry increased almost exponentially: from 2,777 in 1953 to 16,281 in 1954, thence 35,598 in 1955. As the number of reported miscarriages remains roughly constant throughout this period, this rise must be due to increased reporting of abortions previously hidden from the administration rather than an actual increase.[420] A corollary effect of the HAGV, it seems, was to increase the legibility of women's reproduction.

In all this the party leadership's primary concern was to head off the declining birth rate. According to Gábor Jobbágyi,

> The "abortion question" [*az abortuszkérdes*] was always presented as a population policy, or demographic, question. That it was also a medical, legal, moral, and social question was never considered.[421]

The birthrate did increase all throughout the country: In Budapest alone, the number of live births rose from 28,694 in 1952 to 37,920 in 1953.[422] Just as the continued decline in 1951 and 1952 had been partially responsible for the decision to ban abortion, so was the upswing in the birthrate regarded as a success by regime demographers. Indeed, a

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[418] Although the conviction rate (i.e., the ratio of those sentenced to those brought to trial) also dips significantly in the second half of 1953—from the pre-New Course norm of 92% to 75%—this is more a reflection of the high volume of cases the courts were reviewing during this period. By late 1954, the conviction rate had returned to around 90%. MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Eü) /18 ő.e., p. 340 and MOL-M-KS-276. f. 96 (Iü) / 36 ő.e., passim.

[419] Pető, "Women's Rights," p. 52.

[420] Valuch, p. 34. There were on average about 40,000 miscarriages per year during the 1950s.

[421] Gábor Jobbágyi, "Az abortuszkérdes," p. 54.

[422] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Eü) / 6 ő.e., p. 115.

1954 study—with its projections based on the post-decree birth rate—forecast a burgeoning young population by 1965.[423] As long as the issue was viewed at this abstract and impersonal level, the regime's pronatalist scheme was a success.

Nurses and doctors, and the women whose reproduction had been planned for them, had a different perspective. Even prior to 1953, the hospital system had never received adequate support from the state. Its funds were cut even more during the New Course—precisely when a horde of babies descended upon the maternity wards and nurseries. A medical student interviewed by RFE in October 1953 recalled that the gynecological wards were swamped with expectant 13- and 15-year olds.[424] One nurse recounted her experience trying to run the premature ward at a major Budapest hospital during this time: six cubicles, each measuring two by two meters and intended to hold four babies apiece, usually held eight or nine instead.

> Two babies had to lie in one bed. For two more, cushions were put into the drawer of the dressing table, which had to be kept on top of the bathtub and taken away at bathing time. Aside from this, a stool with a laundry basket had to accommodate one or two more babies.[425]

In another Budapest hospital, 22 cribs were somehow fit into a 20-square meter room.[426] Numerous sources cite other instances of 2 and 3 babies to a crib, and bedlinens left unchanged for several shifts at a time. Contagious diseases spread like wildfire in these

[423] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Eü) / 18 ő.e., pp. 341-345.
[424] OSA/RFE Items 10932/53, mf 30.
[425] OSA/RFE Items 165/56, mf 63.
[426] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Eü) / 2 ő.e., p. 66.

hothouse conditions.[427] The few crèches, children's homes, and factory nurseries that had been built were swamped with children.

The complete absence of planning for this baby boom was even more obvious outside of Budapest. Reports to the Ministry of Health from all over the country regularly decried the lack of adequate facilities, beds, medicine, and medical staff.[428] A December 1953 report from the Szolnok county party headquarters revealed that not a single rural medical facility had been modernized since the prewar period. Hospital expansions planned years prior had not yet been completed, and there were severe shortages of medical equipment. These factors resulted in a county-wide *34%* mortality rate among premature babies in 1953. In Karcag, the maternity ward was 400 meters down the road from the hospital itself, and there was no provision for transportation between the two points.[429] In Kunszentmiklós, the building intended to serve as a maternity ward was instead converted into a goose hatchery in 1954. When a birthing mother died due to inadequate treatment shortly thereafter, disgust with the regime—"the state cares more about its goslings than its children"—was reported swiftly thereafter.[430] Although the central committee's fixation on population growth might not have been as monomaniacal as Jobbagyi suggests, it is clear that basic provisions for the health of Magyar women and the future generation of workers did not figure largely in the pronatalist campaign—with drastic consequences for those women who chose to have children at this time.

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[427] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Eü) / 9 ő.e., pp. 7, 29, 34-37; see also OSA/RFE Items 6121/53, mf 24, and OSA/RRE 11001/53, mf 30.
[428] See, e.g., MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Eü) / 18 ő.e., pp. 55, 88, 90, 189, 204.
[429] MOL M-KS 276. f. 96 (Eü) / 2 ő.e., p. 45.

In light of this blatant administrative oversight, it is not surprising that the finer points of the pronatalist campaign were also overlooked or ignored by local officials. The HAGV's provisions safeguarding women's salaries as they took on less-strenuous jobs while pregnant, and guaranteeing their return to their original positions upon their return from maternity leave, were often ignored by employers. In most cases, pregnant women were simply told that there were no easier positions available, and put out of work. The December 1953 follow-up report on the Mother- and Child-Protection Act in Budapest found numerous examples of pregnant women denied less-strenuous positions and new mothers who were denied their old positions on returning after childbirth.[431] A nationwide Health Ministry survey conducted in 1954 found that "in both Budapest and the countryside, the lighter-work requirement for pregnant women is not observed in many factories, and difficult to implement in others." Although it did assert that some factories—those in which "there is a factory doctor and a district nurse and the relationship with the factory administration and trade union is good"—were able to successfully live up to the lighter-work and return policies, it only named one factory in which this was actually the case. The majority of enterprises surveyed were failures in this regard.[432] The benefits associated with the Mother- and Child-Protection Act were likewise distributed in scattershot manner. One RFE informant reported in early 1954 that every woman who gave birth received her 400 forints straightaway—800, if she was underage.[433] If true, this would be the exception rather than the norm. An October 1953

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[430] MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 423 ő.e., p. 450.
[431] BFL XXXV. 95e. 86 ő.e. pp. 2-4.
[432] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Eü) / 2 ő.e., p. 66.
[433] OSA/RFE Items 6938/54, mf 41.

report from the Kaposvár party organization to the Health Ministry revealed numerous problems with the administration of the birth bonus. It disclosed that

> The distribution of the awards for the mothers of many children has not been uniformly applied in our county. It has recently come to our attention that mothers who have 7, 8, or 9 children have been overlooked and have yet to receive any sort of award. In the future the social-political organs as well as welfare officers will monitor how the district committees recommend these mothers for awards.[434]

In light of the above evidence, it seems that regime officials were probably wise to focus solely on the demographic effects of its pronatalist campaign: it was a failure by any other standard.

The nominal success of this campaign was clearly not a straightforward function of the state's persecution of abortion providers and these deviant women. The birth rate had declined throughout 1951 and 1952 when prosecution was at its peak, and it continued to rise even after prosecution was reduced. Here, two corollary effects of the New Course are of central importance. One element of Nagy's scheme to "rationalize" industry was to decentralize decision-making to some extent, putting more power in the hands of local managers—who were, in turn, reliant on the elite cadre of skilled male workers to ensure that quotas were still met even as costs were cut. Moreover, although all workers benefited from New Course price cuts and wage increases to some degree, the shift in focus from heavy industry to light manufacture and agriculture resulted in the disappearance of many well-paying jobs. The net effect of these changes was that many workers lost their jobs or were moved into less-lucrative positions. New workers—

[434] MOL M-KS-276. f. 96 (Eü) / 9 ő.e., p. 41.

peasants, younger workers, and above all women—were the ones with the least influence with either the shop floor patriarchy or management, and thus the first to find themselves rationalized.[435] After June 1953, the egalitarian drive to include women in industrial production was substantially weakened by what was essentially an implicit gentlemen's agreement between managers and their skilled male elite. Women lost out as a result.

Viewing the 1953-54 baby boom solely as a victory for the state and patriarchal tradition would be a mistake. Hungarian women who wanted to have children had been thwarted by a vicious two decades of history: the Depression, then World War II, then the poverty-stricken postwar years, and then the heyday of stalinist rule had all made having children and raising a family a difficult proposition. Frequent oversights and unfulfilled promises aside, the HAGV made having children a much more viable option than at any other time in the last twenty years. This simple desire to raise a family is apparent in the November 1954 interview with a peasant woman who had until recently lived in a small village near Szeged. She discussed her recent marriage and the birth of her first child with a Radio Free Europe interviewer at some length.[436] She and her husband were married, in a church, in the summer of 1953; she did not work outside the home, and became pregnant shortly after the wedding. When she was due in March 1954, her husband took her to the nearest large village by oxcart, and then an ambulance took her the rest of the way to the hospital in Szeged. She went into labor en route and gave birth just as she arrived at the hospital. There were no further complications with the delivery of her first child, and the 27-year old mother was sent to the maternity ward shortly

[435] Mark Pittaway, "Rethinking the Hungarian Revolution: Industrial Workers, the Disintegration and Reconstruction of Socialism, 1953-1958" (unpublished manuscript, 2006), pp. 13-14.

thereafter. While at the Szeged hospital, this women was made painfully aware of the repercussions of the regime's abortion policy:

> Unfortunately, I also remember a number of deaths during my stay there. For instance, when the ambulance brought some woman to the obstetrical ward who seemed suspicious (because someone, or she herself, had interfered with her pregnancy) the doctors could not examine her. If she did not admit that some doctor, midwife, or whoever else had intervened in her pregnancy, and name them, she could not be admitted to the clinic and might even bleed to death right there.
>
> Such a thing happened while I was laid up in the clinic. This woman—the only thing I knew about her was her name, something like Ilona—did not want to "confess," and the inquiry into the matter took so long that medical help was not administered. She died right in front of our eyes.[437]

These markedly divergent outcomes of these two women's encounters with the communist regime are instructive. Our informant was no ideal socialist woman: she had not joined the party, the women's organization, nor the collective farm. However, these failings did not result in her persecution, much less her death. "Ilona," on the other hand, was guilty of having procured an abortion—or perhaps merely the victim of a simple mishap. Had she survived, she might have been tried for this crime and sentenced to six months to a year, or possibly more, in prison. Whatever our informant's other transgressions were, in duly performing her reproductive role she was at least acting in accordance with the regime's gendered imperative—but this was also a choice she made of her own accord.

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[436] OSA/RFE Items 10080/54, mf 45.
[437] Ibid., p. 8.

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No more power to uneducated peasant women!
—one of many slogans shouted during the 1956 Revolution[438]

In the party-state's drive to modernize Hungary, the mobilization of women in industry was both ideologically sound and economically necessary. Just as the prewar, bourgeois socioeconomic hierarchy was to be replaced by equality of all workers, so was the preexisting patriarchal order to be supplanted by gender equality and equal opportunity for women. However, as Katerina Clark found in the case of revolutionary Russia, even "when there is an inversion in the hierarchy of class…. a fundamental inversion of the hegemonic hierarchies is much more difficult to attain."[439] To build on this point, it is also the case that the initial surge of iconoclastic and revolutionary fervor will often recongeal around some preexisting axiologies once the dust settles: in this case, the patriarchal norms of interwar Hungary. This process is clearly apparent in the early history of the USSR, when various measures intended to ensure equality for women (especially work opportunities, the right to divorce and appeal for alimony, and the legalization of abortion) were instated as early as 1918, but were largely abandoned by the mid-1930s.[440] The same basic trend holds for Hungary; here, however, this thermidorian process took less than a decade.

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[438] Quoted in Éva Fodor, *Working Difference*, p. 122.
[439] Katerina Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 11.
[440] See Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

The regime's mobilization of women as workers and activists resulted in a patriarchal backlash. Their successes, from being promoted at work to fulfilling their MNDSz duties and *népnevelő* subscription quotas, were perceived as encroachments upon male prerogative. Although some women were able to work the system to their advantage—among them women of poor-peasant and working-class origin, who would never have had such opportunities under the old regime—most were subjected to the double burden of taking on wage labor while still being responsible for the household. The working mother was the norm; deviance from it, in the form of either sex work or reproductive independence, was considered a problem by both the state and patriarchal elements of society.

The history of prostitution in early communist Hungary clearly indicates the gradual evolution of a workable symbiosis between regime and patriarchal interests. Although the administration set out to abolish prostitution, it proved unable to do so. Indeed, closing the brothels was probably counterproductive, as it removed a reliable means of policing female sexuality without providing an effective alternative in its place. Regulating sexuality then took the form of close surveillance of not only bars and cafés, but also the homes of potentially-deviant (i.e., single or jobless) women. In any case, the regime gradually scaled back its attempts to abolish prostitution. By the 1960s, the social and legal status of prostitution was such that it had resumed its patriarchal function of social control. Although the monitoring of female sexuality had shifted from brothels to other public spaces—and, notably, residences as well—communist prostitution policy otherwise bore a strong resemblance to its bourgeois predecessor.

The politics of reproduction in Hungary also demonstrate this collusion between the state and patriarchal elements of society. The liberalization of abortion policy in 1945 was, historically speaking, an anomaly. As the birth rate dropped, historic concerns about national extinction dovetailed with the regime's desire for more workers. Propaganda and show trials both antedated the legal restriction of abortion in 1953. Despite these measures, an illegal abortion network persisted throughout the period: much as in liberal-democratic societies, banning abortion only drove it underground instead of eradicating it. Throughout the period, those women who chose to have children did so; those that did not were able to regulate their reproduction even in late 1952 and early 1953, when abortion was most stringently controlled—and afterwards, when the state's proscriptions were augmented by the reassertion of patriarchal control. The regime's success in combating *magzatelhajtás* came only when its proscriptions aligned with benefits for mothers and, more importantly, the reassertion of shop floor male prerogative after the advent of the New Course. Shunted into lower-paying jobs or out of work entirely, many women chose to take advantage of the benefits offered by the HAGV. The point is that stalinist repression was not the sole, or even the major, key to increasing the birthrate: it was rather the return to patriarchy that resulted in the population policy's nominal success.

Prostitution and abortion policy under communism reveal that social interests were fragmentary and divided, and not diametrically opposed to the party-state's ambitions on every issue. These gendered forms of criminal behavior do not demonstrate the straightforward linkage between crime and resistance apparent in the previous two chapters. Underlying patriarchal norms both complicated the regime's intentions—as

was the case with prostitution—and complemented them, as occurred in the battle over reproductive freedom. It seems likely that many of those women labeled prostitutes by the regime were merely guilty of practicing the same sexual freedom men enjoyed. Some—especially those already condemned by a *deklasszalt* background—may have simply been wearing lipstick, hats, or high heels, or acting in a manner that clashed with the unique stew of administrative and patriarchal social norms in effect throughout the period. The motives of the women and doctors arrested for *magzatelhajtás* are similarly opaque. Women based their reproductive choices on a number of factors and subject to many pressures. I suspect that most made these choices based on personal, individual factors rather than as a deliberate attempt to thwart regime policy, while some doctors certainly performed abortions for pecuniary gain rather than out of any sort of oppositional intent.

In any case, to the extent these behaviors were indeed intended as acts of resistance, they were directed against not only the regime but also the resurgent patriarchal norms of society. As we have seen in the previous two chapters, the communist administration was riddled with competing interest groups. This interdepartmental and administrative confusion severely hampered its ability to carry out the desires of the party elite, and unified and mobilized broad segments of society against certain of the state's acts. But as the above gender troubles suggest, society was no monolithic entity either. Gender difference and the persistence of patriarchy significantly influenced the state's attempts to alter social norms of sexuality and reproduction, problematizing the former but enabling the latter. Moreover, gender was not the only

divisive factor in Hungarian society under communism. As we shall see in the following chapter, there was also a generation gap.

CHAPTER 4: COSMOPOLITANISM AND DEVIANT LEISURE

A curious letter to the editor appeared in an August 1953 issue of *Esti Budapest*, the evening leisure newspaper for Communist Hungary. Entitled "We want to dance properly," it described one young reader's unsettling experience from the previous weekend:

> I'm young, I love life and I'm happy that I am living right at this moment. I also like to have a good time. Last Sunday something happened to me that I can find no explanation for. Three of us were walking around downtown looking for a good time…we heard music emanating from the Hungarian-Soviet fellowship club. We tried to get in, but were denied entry at the door. This surprised us, but we were even more surprised when we looked into the club. A jazz ensemble was playing in front of the young crowd—but in such a manner! There were four or five couples dancing . . . also outrageously! If we hadn't been in the Hungarian-Soviet Fellowship club, we could've imagined that we were in some kind of American dancehall. … We want to dance properly and not in the American, hooligan [*jampec*] mode. We asked each other how it is possible that people dance in this manner in Budapest, and moreover how this could happen in such a place as the Hungarian-Soviet fellowship club.[441]

In the absence of any contextual evidence, it is impossible to determine this young correspondent's ingenuousness: this letter to the editor can be read as either the honest dismay of a true believer or a particularly adept case of "speaking Bolshevik."[442] What is certain, however, is that an underground jazz scene permeated communist Hungary. In the late 1940s and early 1950s—at the peak of the cold war, and before the advent of rock

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441 "Mi rendesen akarunk táncolni," *Esti Budapest*, 12 August 1953.

442 It is tempting to read this letter in the latter light, demonstrating as it does that it is specifically the Soviet-Hungarian club that is the site of this illicit behavior, and occurring as it does in the wake of Stalin's death and the advent of the New Course, when criticism of the Soviet presence was more likely.

and roll—jazz was one of the more tempting cultural exports the USA had to offer. Scores of sources recount how Hungarians tuned in to jazz as well as political broadcasts from Western radio broadcasts on a regular basis, in villages as well as Budapest; moreover, musicians regularly flaunted the official proscriptions against playing jazz in bars, clubs, and cafes.

Worst of all—from the regime's standpoint—jazz seemed to be the major culprit in the coalescence of a deviant youth subculture: the *jampec*, or hooligan. These young working-class males wore flashy clothes, danced the latest western dances late into the night, and mouthed off to officials; they epitomized the recrudescent threat of western influence, or 'cosmopolitanism.' To the communist regime, this hip debauchery threatened not only the transformation of society currently underway, but also—as it was the youth who took to it most ardently—the entire forthcoming generation of workers. Ironically, on the other side of the Iron Curtain, roughly the same assumptions were made about the subversive potential of jazz, and the significance of hooliganism: Eisenhower's White House used jazz as a popular-cultural complement to its propaganda broadcasts,[443] and the analysts at Radio Free Europe (RFE) interpreted the *jampec* phenomenon as a sign of open resistance to communist rule.[444] Held in thrall as they were by the oversimplified and manichaean logic of the Cold War, observers both east and west concluded that the intrusion of jazz into the Communist cultural sphere was a proximate cause of ideological subversion.

Although the impact of American culture in the postwar period has inspired a wealth of literature on the "coca-colonization" of Western Europe, its effects in Eastern Europe remain largely unexamined.[445] Analyses of the effects of western media in Eastern Europe have for the most part focused on the supposed political impact of broadcasts by stations such as RFE, Voice of America (VOA), and Armed Forces Network (AFN).[446] Hungary is no exception to this rule: fifty years on, one of the central debates in the historiography of 1956 remains the issue of Radio Free Europe's complicity in inspiring or exacerbating the doomed rebellion.[447] This debate seems deadlocked until the actual listening practices of Hungarians are examined in more detail.[448] Leaving aside the indeterminate effects of western political broadcasts, it is clear that American and western European culture—in the form of literature, movies, and

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443 According to a December 1955 progress report on NSC 5505/1, the "Music USA" program, which consisted of one hour of popular music and one hour of jazz, was explicitly targeted at youthful listeners in an effort to undermine Communist authority. DEPL, OSANSA Records, NSC Policy Papers, Box 14, pp. 15,18. This report was finally declassified in February 2006. See also Joanna Granville, *The Last Domino* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2004), pp. 158-164.

444 OSA/RFE Items 12594/52, mf 14, "Evaluation Comments."

445 See, e.g., Phil Melling and Jon Roper, editors, *Americanisation and the Transformation of World Cultures* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), and Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). For a recent analysis that discusses cultural consumption on both sides of the Iron Curtain, see David Crew, editor, *Consuming Germany in the Cold War* (New York: Berg, 2003).

446 See Alan L. Heil, *Voice of America: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: the Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), Michael Nilson, *The War of the Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting During the Cold War* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), George Urban, *Radio Free Europe and the Struggle for Democracy: My War Within the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

447 Most recently, Charles Gati has argued that RFE should have supported Imre Nagy when he first assumed power, and that the station was guilty of unduly encouraging the rebels, while A. Ross Johnson has argued that it was, by and large, blameless. Gati, *Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006), p. 102, and Johnson, "Setting the Record Straight: Role of Radio Free Europe in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956," HAPP Occasional paper No.3, http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/happ.OP-3.pdf (viewed 1 December 2007), pp. 1. 26.

especially jazz—were quite popular on the other side of the Iron Curtain.[449] Hungarians avidly consumed the literature, movies, and music of the West—especially jazz, "the forbidden fruit" ("*a tiltott gyümölcs*"[450]) of decadent capitalist culture. The regime proved unable to effectively combat this threat. Its relevant constituent elements—the communist press, the legal administration, and the Organization of Working Youth (*Dolgozó Ifjúság Szövetsége*, or DISz)—operated at cross purposes. Initially, the *jampec* served as a useful propaganda tool, a stereotypical 'folk devil,'[451] and the communist press railed against these youthful deviants on a regular basis. This moral entrepreneurship did not fall entirely on deaf ears, as some members of the older generation—fed up with the perceived loose morals of the youth, and wary of the economic threat young workers posed to their livelihood—were receptive to this message. At the same time, the police and legal administration closely monitored the most extreme manifestation of youthful deviance in the form of juvenile crime, while the DISz sought to convert the young to the communist cause. These control measures were

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[448] See Mark Pittaway's "The Education of Dissent: The Reception of the Voice of Free Hungary, 1951-1956," *Cold War History*, Volume IV, Number 1 (October 2003), pp. 97-116, for a promising first step in this direction.

[449] For the most part, scholars of Eastern Europe have focused on rock and roll rather than jazz. See, e.g., Anna Szemere, *Up From the Underground: The Culture of Rock Music in Postsocialist Hungary* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2001), Sabrina Ramet, editor, *Rocking the State: Rock Music and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994) Timothy Ryback, editor, *Rock around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). The exception to this rule is Uta Poiger's excellent *Jazz, Rock and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). On jazz in the USSR, see Michael May, "Swingin' Under Stalin: Russian Jazz During the Cold War and Beyond," in Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May, editors, *Here, There, and Everywhere: The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture,* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000), pp. 179-191, S. Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union* (New York: Limelight, 1994), and William Minor, *Unzipped Souls* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

[450] Géza Gábor Simon, editor, *Fejezetek a Magyar Jazz történetéből 1961-ig* (Budapest: Magyar Jazzkutatási Társaság, 2001), p. 175.

[451] See Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), especially pp. 149-172.

not successful. As hooliganism worsened in the mid-1950s, the *jampec* stereotype crept into the administrative transcript as well. DISz reports on working-class youth reveal a deep-seated anxiety about the spread of hooliganism among factory workers. It seems that the propaganda machine might have operated *too* well, inadvertently encouraging rather than dissuading youthful deviance of this type. In any case, the battle against western culture was lost by summer 1956. On the jazz front, the attempted cultural revolution was in retreat long before the actual shooting started in October.

Communist Culture and All That Jazz

The ideologues that ran the communist state sought to complement their political and economic centralization with a cultural program that would recast everyman (and -woman) in the communist mold. This program was based on the Soviet model that had calcified in the course of the 1930s. In the Soviet Union, communist cultural policy was initially inchoate. During the 1920s, censors had allowed a remarkable degree of freedom to filmmakers and other artists.[452] The result was the Soviet avant-garde movement, one of socialism's lasting contributions to world culture. Films such as Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) forever changed the way movies were made. These films' technical brilliance was not matched by popular acclaim, as most viewers preferred films with clear

[452] Although the impact of socialist innovation was felt in all forms of cultural production, I will focus herein on cinema, as Lenin proclaimed it "the most important of the arts" and also to provide historical context for the two Hungarian films I discuss below. On Hungarian cinema during this period, see Gábor Szilágyi, *Tüzkeresztség* (Budapest: Magyar Filmintézet, 1992) and *Életjel* (Budapest: Magyar Filmintézet, 1994).

plot lines and characters with which they could identify.[453] The avant-garde's ambition to change the world also clashed with the hardening contours of the stalinist system. Stalin's "fantasectomy" in 1928 resulted in a dramatic shift: cultural production settled down into a rut of heavily-censored "boy-girl-tractor-machine gun" melodramas. After World War II, this model was transplanted to all the countries of Eastern Europe wholesale.

During the interwar period, Hungarian film production had closely mirrored the European norm: light melodramas intended to appeal to a broad audience. As the audience for Hungarian language-films was small, Hungarian filmmaking had been heavily subsidized by the government. The result was a thriving cinema culture: eight to ten new movies were released every year, more than in Czechoslovakia or even Austria, and Hungarian actors and directors such as Béla Lugosi, Peter Lorrie, and Mihály Kertész were known throughout the world.[454] Although film production continued right up until October 1944, most studios and production facilities were destroyed or severely damaged during the 1944-45 siege of Budapest. The industry was slow to bounce back after the war: only five films were produced domestically in 1946 and 1947.[455] Filmmaking was therefore firmly under the aegis of stalinist culture when it resumed in earnest in 1948. Hungarian filmmaking, "one of the best weapons on the cultural and educational front," was rigorously censored, while American films, "the propaganda weapon of the

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[453] Denise Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[454] Kenez, *Hungary From The Nazis to the Soviets*, pp. 240-241. Kertész's name is better known in its Americanized form, Michael Curtiz.

[political] reaction" and the product of the "Hollywood gangster-school," were banned.[456] Cinema, like all forms of communist culture, was intended to both entertain and educate. It failed on both counts.

There seems to have been a close symbiosis between stage and screen, to the benefit of filmmakers and the detriment of filmgoers. Censorship in the early Soviet film industry had generated a great deal of uncertainty among filmmakers and screenwriters about what sorts of screenplays might be acceptable. The result was a persistent shortage of screenplays, or the "scenario crisis."[457] This does not seem to have been as much a problem in Hungary, as Hungarian filmmakers hit on the solution of adapting contemporary theatre productions for film. As these plays had been thoroughly vetted by censors, they were much safer than taking a chance on untried material. Thus the play "State Department Store" ("Állami Aruhaz") was swiftly followed by a film version in 1952, and "The Day of Wrath" ("A Harag Napja") ran at the National Theater in 1952 before it was made into a movie in 1953.[458] The only exception to this rule seems to have been the cinematization of the theatre production of "Unforgettable 1919," which ran at the National Theater in early 1952. It was announced under production in May of

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[455] Balázs Varga, editor, *Játékfilmek / Hungarian Feature Films, 1931-1998* (Budapest: Magyar Filmintézet / Argumentum Kiadó Nyomdaüzeme, 1999), pp. 315-318. One of these films, Géza Radványi's *Somewhere in Europe* (*Valahol Európában*, 1947), remains on of the best Hungarian films ever made despite its ideological bias.

[456] "Milyen Magyar filmet vár?," *Szinház és Mozi*, 9 December 1949, and "Amerikai Film – A Népbutitás fegyvere," *Szinház és Mozi*, 15 January 1950, "Hollywoodi gengszter-iskola," *Szinház és Mozi*, 2 July 1950.

[457] Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era, 1918-1935* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), pp. 67-71.

[458] Theatre and film listings, *Szinház és Mozi*, 23 May 1952, 30 May 1952.

1952 but never released as a movie.[459] (The tympanist for the National Theater Orchestra was one of the 1956 émigrés. Although he recalled this production as "horrendous," its failure to materialize on the silver screen was probably more due to the ongoing struggle in the MDP between the ruling Muscovite faction and the veterans of the 1919 revolution).[460] The result, however, was that bad theatre productions were transformed into bad movies. Practically every escapee and émigré interviewed declaimed the poor quality, predictable plot lines, and ideological pandering that characterized communist theatre and cinema.

> Until about 1953, people had to talk to each other in this way in the plays. "My darling," said the man to the woman, "I love you so much that I am ready to fulfill my quota better tomorrow than before."[461]

Indeed, even the physical character of the trade magazine, *Theatre and Film* (*Szinház és Mozi*), was suggestive of the deadening of cultural life under communism. In the immediate postwar period, *Szinház és Mozi* was an attractive, thick, four-color publication with many photographs and articles. It gradually dwindled in size in the late 1940s, and in early 1951 switched to black-and-white as well. Thus, literally as well as figuratively cultural life literally became more monochrome under communism. This drab official culture foundered on two well-established, preexisting modes of social and

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[459] "Visnyevski: Feledhetetlen [sic] 1919, *Szinház és Mozi*, 4 April 1952, "Film a "Fejlethetelen 1919"-ről," *Szinház és Mozi*, 16 May 1952.
[460] Mevius, *Agents of Moscow*, pp. 69-86.
[461] CUHRP Interview 102, Box 7, p. 56. Although some sources also recalled some productions that covertly attacked the regime, especially after 1953, they are in the minority.

cultural interaction: Catholicism and the world of 'decadent' leisure centered on the jazz scene.

Catholicism provided a persistent locus of resistance to the regime. In Hungary, the Catholic Church had long been a central element of the Hungarian national identity. The rapport between church and state had become especially close during the conservative Horthy regime.[462] The "opiate of the masses" was, of course, antithetical to Communism, and the Bolshevik takeover in Russia had been accompanied by widespread destruction of churches and other measures intended to eradicate religious belief.[463] In the immediate postwar period, the MKP held off on attacking the church directly. In their quest to win over the support of the Hungarian populace, party activists even offered to help rebuild churches damaged in the war.[464] This tentative truce lasted until 1948. The party signaled its attack on religion with the nationalization of religious schools, the silencing of the Catholic press, and the jailing of Cardinal József Mindszenty, Primate of Hungary, on trumped-up charges of black-marketeering. The Vatican responded to these actions by excommunicating all Catholics who aided communism.[465] Thereafter the regime promoted a "peace priest" movement, which ostensibly transcended the differences between communism and Catholicism in the greater service of world peace. Priests who were willing to go along with the regime were allowed to remain in their

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[462] Paul Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary: Religion, Nationalism, and Antisemitism, 1890-1944* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 2, and Wittenberg, *Crucibles of Political Loyalty*, p. 81.

[463] Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

[464] Kenez, *Hungary From the Nazis to the Soviets*, p. 177. This conciliatory spirit did not extend to the Catholic youth organization, KALOT, which was disbanded in 1946. Wittenberg, *Crucibles of Political Loyalty*, p. 84.

posts, while those that resisted were arrested.[466] In essence, church personnel were forced to choose between excommunication and incarceration. Many defiantly opted for the latter, which led to the unlikely spectacle of nuns working alongside prostitutes in labor camps.[467] Others signed on to the movement in order to serve their flock as best they could. Enough priests chose the latter option, or eluded the administration's gaze, that many churches remained open and religious observance persisted throughout the period.

These forces of "clerical reaction" (*klerikális reakció*) persistently opposed the communist project. The relatively simple expedient of attending church in a different neighborhood seems to have worked for many Magyars.[468] In smaller towns, church services seem to have gone on with little or no interference from the state.[469] As with theft from the state, popular perceptions of religious practice clearly articulate the deliberate oppositional intent behind these acts:

> There was a religious revival and many people went to church. They were overcrowded so much that evening masses had to be instituted. People went to church not only for religious reasons, but they saw in it a means of resistance to Communism.[470]

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[465] Wittenberg, *Crucibles of Political Loyalty*, pp. 87-88, 91-92. Mindszenty was no stranger to incarceration. He had previously been jailed in 1919, for opposing the Hungarian Socialist republic, and again in 1944, for speaking out against the Arrow Cross.

[466] Wittenberg, *Crucibles of Political Loyalty*, pp. 93-102. For a detailed account of the crackdown on the churh, see István Sziklai, "A Magyar Katolikus Egyház Kriminalizálásának Főbb Vonásai (1950)," in *Valóság*, Volume XLV, Number 6 (June 2002).

[467] OSA/RFE Items 12950/52, mf 15.

[468] See also OSA/RFE Items 1393/53, mf 19 and CUHRP Interview 103, Box 7, p. 11.

[469] OSA/RFE Items 8851/54, mf 44, OSA/RFE Items 2394/55, mf 51.

[470] CUHRP Interview 121, Box 8, p. 26.

> Attending church became a political deed and people usually went to different districts so they would not be observed in their own home church. For funerals and baptisms people often went to distant parishes to remain undetected.[471]

According to one source, a covert mass was even celebrated deep in the shafts of the Tatabánya mines: communion wine and bread were smuggled in, and Catholic priests among the workers performed the service from memory—all while the workers were on the clock.[472] Numerous official reports on workers' attitudes revealed that clerical reaction remained a thorn in the regime's side, especially in rural areas.[473] Religion, like the various other social networks described in previous chapters, also provided a locus of anti-regime identity and persisted under the communist regime.

Just as many Hungarians were predisposed to continue worshiping as they had previously, so did they also prefer to remain involved in the broader cultural sphere they had inhabited before 1948. Hungary enjoyed a long history of interaction with mainstream European culture, and, especially since the early twentieth century, with Americanized global culture as well. In reaction to the literature sanctioned by the regime, Hungarians continued to read western classics and popular western-style literature, primarily cowboy novels and whodunits.[474] Although American films were not allowed, western European films (primarily from France and Italy) were periodically

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[471] CUHRP Interview 101, Box 7, pp. 9, 34.
[472] OSA/RFE Items 10040/55, mf 61.
[473] MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 646 ő.e., p 1.
[474] On the popularity and availability of western literature and pulp fiction, see OSA/RFE Items 6687/53, mf 25, OSA/RFE Items 2089/54, mf 35, OSA/RFE Items 7824/55, mf 58, and OSA/RFE Items 3133/56, mf 66. One of the more popular writers of the time was Jenő Rejtő (1905-1943) who assumed the Americanized nom de plume of P. Howard. One of his books, "the 14-Karat Roadster," is available online at http://mek.oszk.hu/01000/01021/01021.htm (translated by Patricia Boszó; viewed 1 December 2007). On the popularity of cowboy novels in the DDR see Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels*, pp 40-42.

shown on Hungarian screens. They were much more popular than their Soviet competitors: tickets to western movies had to be purchased well in advance, and may have even caused melees in some towns when tickets ran out.[475] However, both of these vessels of western popular culture paled in comparison to the popularity of jazz in communist Hungary.

Hungarian jazz antedates the advent of the Cold War by decades. During the interwar period, American jazz bands toured Europe nonstop. Often as not, they swung through Budapest, Prague, and Warsaw, and these semi-peripheral cultural sites acted in turn as conduits to the USSR, fuelling the vibrant world of 1920s Soviet jazz.[476] Recordings by Duke Ellington, the Dorsey Brothers, and the Andrews Sisters were snapped up by Hungarian listeners, and movies like *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and *Show Boat* (1929) provided further exposure to the hot new musical style. By the late 1920s, American and western European traveling jazz orchestras like The Chocolate Kiddies and Eddie South and his Orchestra toured through Budapest and the larger provincial towns, providing the opportunity to hear the real thing live. In their wake, Hungarian jazzmen like Orlay Jenő (who went by the nickname of "Chappy") and Lajos Martiny ("Tiny Matton") formed their own jazz orchestras and cut their chops in Budapest clubs before taking their shows on the road to Copenhagen, Paris, Berlin, and the other great European jazz centers.[477] According to S. Frederick Starr, jazz in Hungary was politicized even before the Communists appeared on the scene: "The Hungarian ruler and Fascist

[475] OSA/RFE Items 4872/53, mf 23, OSA/RFE Items 7081/54, mf 41, and OSA/RFE Items 8686/54, mf 43.
[476] "From Moscow, however, the West begins in Lithuania and Estonia, and has as three of its principal centers Warsaw, Budapest, and Prague." Starr, *Red and Hot*, p. 123.

sympathizer Admiral Horthy adroitly exploited jazz in songs extolling his regime."[478] The local recording industry seems to have suffered only a brief setback during World War II: László Kazal recorded a competent version of Glenn Miller's "In the Mood" at the Pátria studio in early 1945, even as most of Budapest still lay in ruins and without electricity after the fierce siege of the previous winter. During the brief period of postwar coalition rule (1945-48), jazz swiftly resumed its preeminence in the popular-cultural sphere, ushering in a "golden age of jazz" ("*a jazz-aranykor*") in Hungary.[479] Radio Budapest played jazz hits in an effort to lure younger listeners, the dance halls were packed with crowds, and hundreds of new jazz recordings were released on Odeon, Pátria, and other domestic labels.

All this changed in 1949. Taking its lead from Moscow, the Rákosi regime banned jazz from the airwaves.[480] Thereafter the communist press regularly excoriated the subversive threat posed by the debased imperialist cultural form, and called for closer monitoring of dance halls.[481] The regime did not stop at merely denouncing this so-called cosmopolitanism in popular culture: the sale of musical instruments (especially saxophones) was restricted, and musicians were required to register with the musician's union. Monitors from the union attended the performances in bars, cafes, and music halls; penalties for playing jazz ranged from a two-week to a two-month suspension for a

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[477] Simon, *Fejezetek*, pp.101, 105-145.
[478] Starr, *Red and Hot*, p. 95.
[479] László Kazal, "In the Mood," with unknown studio band, Pátria studio, 1945. Simon, *Fejezetek*, pp. 268 and 167-188.
[480] Pittaway, "The Education of Dissent," p. 104. See Starr, *Red and Hot*, pp. 210-217, on the jazz ban in the USSR.
[481] See, e.g., "Sok bába között elvész a gyerek," *Esti Budapest*, 2 October 1952.

first offense, and more serious penalties for repeated offenses.[482] Instead of jazz, class-conscious musicians were expected to help the communist project along by serving up the classics (Beethoven, Brahms, etc.) and popularizing the efforts of new Soviet and Hungarian composers. (One 18-year old amateur musician who escaped in 1952 told his RFE interviewer that the latter was music "even a dog couldn't like."[483]) Not only was the Hungarian ear attuned to jazz, but the regime's musical offerings were also tainted by its affiliation with the Soviets and the artificial nature of this imposed 'popular' culture.

Although the state effectively crushed open political dissent, it failed to suppress this subversive cultural practice. A composer of popular music who escaped in 1956 recalled that jazz was played "all the time" in bars, "notwithstanding Communist propaganda and discriminatory measures," throughout the 1950s. By 1955, songs were even being sung in English.[484] The musicians often knew who their monitors were, and could strike up jazz numbers as soon as he or she left for the night.[485] Even when the monitors were still present, intrepid jazzmen could get away with playing regime-sanctioned music with jazz-inflected tempo and phrasing.[486] One polemic in *Esti Budapest* was particularly indignant on this point, singling out a Pest music club where the house band played not only Soviet and modern Hungarian music with an American

[482] OSA/RFE Items 5462/55, mf 55, Interview with Géza Gábor Simon, Director, Jazz Oktatási és Kutatási Alapítvány [Jazz Instruction and Research Institute], October 2004.
[483] OSA/RFE Items 13388/52, mf 15.
[484] CUHRP Box 7, Interview 102, p. 21.
[485] Interview with Géza Gábor Simon, October 2004.
[486] OSA/RFE Items 13388/52, mf 15. In this regard it seems that the jazz ban in Hungary was not policed as closely as its Soviet counterpart. In the latter case, if Starr does not exaggerate, "Chords built on flattened fifths, vibrato by brass players, and the deliberate use of semi-tone 'blue notes'" were all grounds for punishment. Starr, *Red and Hot*, p. 215.

swing feel, but also Beethoven.[487] Albeit probably more prevalent in the upscale bars frequented by foreign diplomats and businessmen (and party officials), jazz also flourished in the working-class districts. According to one youth interviewed in early 1953, from the way they danced the rhumba at a rough bar called the Vince-Vendeglő, "even Americans could learn a thing or two about dancing."[488] Jazz was also popular in the provinces. One source recalled how at a firemen's ball in the small town of Fertőszentmiklós, the attendees would only dance to jazz; an 18-year old unskilled laborer from Nagykáta (pop.17,000) who escaped in 1954 also declaimed the popularity of jazz concerts at the local youth club; and at the 1953 New Year's Eve Party in Kapuvár, the band "played such a hot samba that the communists joined in as well."[489] Communist cultural policy was singularly unsuccessful—and this, in turn, raised the specter that the regime's successes might fall prey to cosmopolitan recidivism. As one *Esti Budapest* writer lamented, "everything disfigured and loathsome in the capitalist morality" could be found in the jazz bars and music halls of Budapest.[490] Western culture was contagious, and the communist regime's immune system was sorely lacking the antibodies necessary to combat the western invasion.

The social impact of jazz as a performative cultural practice in communist Hungary, as anywhere, is difficult to gauge. In the United States, the history of jazz is inextricably entwined with the history of race relations. Ever since its invention by

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[487] "Tiszteséges műsort, mai életünkhöz méltó hangulatot vácnak a dolgozók a zenés szórakozóhelyektől," *Esti Budapest*, 19 June 1952. See also "Megegyszer a zenés szórakozóhelyek műsoráról," *Esti Budapest*, 19 August 1952.
[488] OSA/RFE Items 1896/53, mf 19.
[489] OSA/RFE Items 1896/53, mf 19, OSA/RFE Items 8853/54, mf 44, OSA/RFE Items 993/55, mf 49.
[490] "Amitől meg kell védeni a fiatalokat," *Esti Budapest*, 21 October 1954.

African Americans in the early twentieth century, it has been commodified and appropriated by dominant white culture. Subsequent innovations in jazz styles, formulated as deliberate revolt against the square mainstream, are themselves co-opted in turn.[491] American jazz has served both revolutionary and hegemonic ends. Against the indictments of American racism leveled by Louis Armstrong in the 1950s and Charles Mingus in the 1960s, we must balance the mobilization of big-band swing music during World War II and, for that matter, what Eric Hobsbawm labels "its current resuscitation…as the American classical music of the professional middle class and the dinner music of lower Manhattan Yuppie restaurants."[492] Jazz in the USSR is particularly instructive in this regard, as it illustrates how political shifts redounded in that preexisting communist popular-cultural sphere. Jazz was subjected to Maksim Gorkii's puritanical rants in the late 1920s, but rescued in the early 1930s by the 'realization' that it was the music of the oppressed African American underclass and therefore ideologically sound (and, incidentally, anathema to the Nazi foe). [493] As in the USA, big band swing music

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[491] David Meltzer puts it best: "imported African sacred/secular instrumental and vocal music that had disembarked in the exotic port of New Orleans, blended in that cosmopolitan city where European travelers and merchants infused Western martial and classical musics into the polyrhythmic African mix, transformed, recirculated into a propulsively dynamic form called *Jazz*. A circular process where enslaved (or oppressed) peoples subvert and transform the master's musics of definition (church, state) into one of defiance that, in turn, becomes a mystery to the master class who sets out to learn its secrets and, as with other property, own it, control its presence in 'normative' culture." *Reading Jazz* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1993), p. 11. See also Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, (London: Routledge, 1979), pp. 46-47.

[492] Eric Hobsbawm, *Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion, and Jazz* (London: Wiedenfield and Nicolson, 1998), p. 247. On Louis Armstrong, see Penny M. Von Eschen, "'Satchmo Blows Up the World:' Jazz, Race, and Empire during the Cold War," in Wagnleitner and May, editors, *Here, There, and Everywhere*; on Mingus, see [anything ever written about Mingus]. On the Soviet mobilization of jazz during WW2, see Starr, *Red and Hot*, Ch. 9.

[493] Starr, *Red and Hot*, Chs. 4-6. Never one to understate his point, Gorkii (1868-1936) described his experience of jazz thus: "Listening for a few minutes to these wails, one involuntarily imagines an orchestra of sexually driven madmen conducted by a man-stallion brandishing a huge genital member." Quoted in Starr, *Red and Hot*, p. 90.

provided the martial soundtrack for World War II. Almost 2/3 of the 460,000 concerts performed for the Red Army and Navy during the conflict were jazz shows. Despite this substantial contribution to the war effort, a persistent bias towards jazz denied Soviet jazzmen (and –women) the recognition awarded to symphonic composers and musicians.[494] Thereafter it was banned in the late 1940s, but then rehabilitated again in the mid-1950s. Thus, in both open and closed cultural spheres 'jazz' is an unstable signifier, and its meaning and effects contingent on political, social, and cultural contexts. In stalinist Hungary, however, this context is clear. Culturally, the music was coded as the barbaric yawp of western capital and debauchery; socially, its practice entailed groups of people gathering surreptitiously for activities banned by the state.

This did not go unnoticed. By mid-1955, the Budapest jazz scene surfaced as a major issue in a closed meeting of the Central Committee of the Budapest party:

> Comrade B.: The trade unions and councils must drastically increase their supervision in the dancing and music clubs. Last week in a music club I noted the musicians were playing imperialistic music in an inappropriate manner. We have also received a report that the Duna hotel orchestra plays only English numbers. Clearly, it's very important that we step up our monitoring of these places.

The other comrades chimed in with similar concerns, and the meeting closed with a slew of corrective resolutions: there would be an extravaganza of 'proper' music performed free that summer, thousands of movie tickets would be sold to youths at discounted

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[494] Even Leonid Utesov, a well-connected, popular jazz performer and personal favorite of Stalin, was unable to get the 1944 Stalin Prize committee to consider any jazz musicians for the coveted prize. Kiril Tomoff, "'Most Respected Comrade…': Patrons, Clients, Brokers, and Unofficial Networks in the Stalinist Music World," in György Péteri, editor, *Patronage, Personal Networks, and the Party-State: Everyday Life in the Cultural Sphere in Communist Russia and East Central Europe* (Trondheim: Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures and Societies, 2004), pp. 39-41.

prices, and the behavior of youths in the hostels and factories would be closely monitored.[495] This last point is central to our understanding of the regime's perception of the jazz scene. The gadfly persistence of jazz was annoying, but the regime's major concern was its social effect on working-class youth. American music, the "product of a sick world,"[496] was the contagion vector responsible for the spread of a strange pandemic that seemed to strike only the young: the *jampec*, or hooligan.

Hooligans, Sex, and Moral Panic

As the following scene described to an RFE interviewer in 1954 indicates, perhaps the Central Committee was not overreacting. The informant, an unskilled laborer, frequented the Tripoli, a dubious joint in a working-class neighborhood. Admission cost only five forints, and a live jazz band played five nights a week. For these reasons it was popular among the younger generation: "kids" (*srácok*), some as young as 14, started at about 5 or 6 pm and stayed up until dawn, drinking, dancing, and raising hell—and on school nights, no less.

> These young men always travel in packs, and if they see a woman alone with a man they make suggestive remarks and try to start something. … They finish two glasses of beer and think they're the strongest men in the world. Fights break out on a regular basis. They don't respect their elders, they have no idea how to behave properly…

[495] BFL XXXV. 95. a. / 124 ő.e., pp. 80, 100-101. Perhaps not surprisingly, Comrade B. did not explain how he had found himself in a jazz club in the first place. The Duna (Gellert) was singled out for its "American" tendencies in a complaint letter to *Szabad Ifjuság* as early as 1953—see MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 673 ő.e., p. 213.
[496] *Esti Budapest*, "a tánczene és a tömegzene kérdéseiről," 16 September 1953.

> When the band plays jazz, one of the kids stands at the door. If a police car approaches, he signals and the band quickly switches to a Moscow-style waltz. The band always plays modern numbers, and the kids "dance as though they were in America." Where they learn those dances is impossible to say. Nor can I explain where they get those drainpipe trousers, those patterned socks, or those gaudy neckties.
>
> The police are perpetually on the prowl for these hooligans. … when they stop one and ask for his papers, if he doesn't answer properly they take him downtown and beat him up—"not exactly because of the drainpipe trousers, but because of them nonetheless."[497]

This Rabelaisian scene was probably not what one Radio Free Europe editor had in mind when he described the phenomenon in 1952:

> In [sic] can however, be assumed that many 'jampec'-s are corageous [sic] 'die-hard' youngsters who dare defy the Communists even risking the inevitable consequences which may go from a through [sic] beating up to jail."[498]

Finally, one of the *jampec* (less frequently '*jampi;*' plural, '*jampecek*' or '*jampik*')—a youth who worked as a meatpacker in Debrecen and escaped in 1954—explained the lifestyle a bit differently:

> In his free time, he went to movies or out drinking somewhere. (It was difficult to get movie tickets, as there were only three theaters in Debrecen.) When there was good music coming out of some bar, he was unable to resist the temptation, and would be inside within moments. By "good music" the source meant jazz, which reputedly was not policed too closely in Debrecen. However, at the same time dancing in the American manner was not permitted. One time a policeman told him: "don't dance like that!" "Well, sir, perhaps you might show me how I must dance?"—he answered, leaving the policeman speechless. …

[497] OSA/RFE Items 8619/54, mf 43.
[498] OSA/RFE Items 12594/52, mf 14, "Evaluation Comments."

> Another time it didn't go off quite as smoothly. It seemed to a policeman that he was dressed in the *jampec* manner (He was wearing a checkered shirt with a zipper, grey trousers, and sandals). When the policeman asked to see his identity card, he refused, as the policeman had not yet shown him his ID either…

Not surprisingly, this second encounter went downhill from there. It ended with the youth being taken to the station and roughed up by the police. (He was eventually released without being charged.)[499] To an outsider, they were rude hooligans; to the RFE, they epitomized a youthful rebellion against the communist system; to an insider, they were just out looking for a good time. What, then, are we to make of the *jampecek*? Were they rebels with, or without, causes?

Sándor Horváth has concluded that hooligans were primarily significant as scapegoats for the failures of the communist project. "One important aim of the state was to control the socialization of the young. Full control over society could not be exercised, of course, and it was much less costly and more spectacular to single out a few youth groups and punish them." Horváth also identifies a shift in the nature of the 'moral panic' built on the *jampec* by the communist media; he argues that their representation shifted from overeager consumers of western culture in the 1950s to sex fiends and outright criminals in the 1960s.[500] Although Horváth focuses primarily on their later incarnation as a rock and roll subculture rather than its jazz-oriented antecedent, my reading of the pre-1956 phenomenon supports his conclusions for the most part.

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[499] OSA/RFE Items 5270/55, mf 55. For other run-ins between *jampecek* and police, see OSA/RFE Items 7041/51, mf 3, OSA/RFE Items 8439/54, mf 43, and OSA/RFE Items 11584/55, mf 62.

However, I find that the representational shift—from deviant consumers to oversexed criminals—occurs well before the 1960s: in fact, before the revolution. The *jampec* made for good propaganda, as a jitterbugging reprobate who neatly illustrated the corrosive dangers of western culture—but this moral entrepreneurship resonated with the regime's increasing preoccupation with juvenile crime, and thereby shaped the perceptions of the *jampecek*'s monitors as well. In the records of the legal administration and the communist youth association (DISz), we find that as hooliganism became more prevalent the moral panic preached by the media was in turn taken seriously by at least some elements of the communist administration.

The term *jampec* itself dates back to the interwar period. It was coined in the late 1920s, as a descriptor of effete upper-class youth; its prewar connotations were dandyism, rakishness, extravagance, and sloth. However, "*jampec* in common parlance also meant a worldly, independent, extravagant lifestyle"—one that could be "an attractive pattern for young skilled workers earning good wages after the Second World War."[501] Such creatures existed in the 1950s, despite the regime's deliberate pauperization of the working class, and they could afford the drinks, cover charges, and above all the clothing that defined the oppositional lifestyle. As Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson argue, youth subcultures are doubly articulated: that is, they coalesce in reaction

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[500] Sándor Horváth, "Hooligans, Spivs and Gangs: Youth Subcultures in the 1960s," in János M. Rainer and György Péteri, *Muddling Through in the Long 1960s: Ideas and Everyday Life in High Politics and the Lower Classes of Communist Hungary* (Budapest: 1956 Institute, 2005), pp. 200, 220. See also Horváth, *A kapu és a határ: mindennapi Sztálinváros* [The Gate and the Border: Everyday Stalintown] (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 2004), pp. 172-185.

[501] Horváth, "Hooligans, Spivs, and Gangs," pp. 204-205. Note that Soviet hooligans in the 1920s also had bourgeois precursors—see Joan Neuberger, *Hooliganism: Crime, Culture and Power in St. Petersburg, 1900-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

to both parent and dominant cultures[502] (in this case, to both working-class norms and state-imposed socialist ideals). In Hungary, the young male worker of the interwar period had endured an extended period of apprenticeship, first as an *inas* ('servant' or 'little serf') and then as a *segéd* ('apprentice,' 'helper'), before eventually joining the ranks of skilled workers. This labor hierarchy was mapped onto the cultural sphere: László Kürti notes that "Once promoted to a *segéd*, the life of the younger worker was closer to that of older workers: he could go out at night, drink with friends, visit girlfriends and smoke cigars or cigarettes."[503] After 1948, the communist regime privileged young workers (as well as peasants and women) in an effort to break the prewar skilled labor hierarchy: the old *inas/segéd* system was abolished in favor of swifter training courses, and age- and gender-based quotas were introduced. Although these 'reforms' were successful in breaking the "solidaristic wage policy" of the prewar unions, as Pittway notes, "the hectic demands of the centralized command economy forced management to rely heavily on the skilled elite of older male workers: these workers were therefore were able to exert some informal bargaining power, but this often occurred at the expense of their younger and female coworkers."[504] Albeit secondary to the overarching dynamic of worker-management conflict, generational tension between old and young workers also characterized shop floor relations in the early 1950s. This was one of the two major socio-structural causes for the subculture's formation.

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[502] Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Postwar Britain* (London: Routledge, 1975). p. 15.
[503] László Kürti, *Youth and the State in Hungary: Capitalism, Communism and Class* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), p. 60.
[504] Pittaway, "The Social Limits of State Control," p. 287, and "Az állami ellenõrzés társadalmi korlátainak újraértékelése," especially pp. 79-80.

The other had to do with demographics. The combined "push" and "pull" factors of the high-modernist project—collectivization, which forced peasants off the land, and industrialization, which resulted in a labor shortage in factories—resulted in a mass influx of peasants, most of them young males, into the cities in search of work. As noted in Chapter 1, the population of Budapest swelled to 1.9 million in 1956. Four-fifths of the explosive population growth was due to inmigration rather than natural increase.[505] Although many of these young men retained ties to their homes (and of them, many illegally left their factory jobs in autumn to help bring in the harvest), the generational, gendered, and familial social controls that shaped village life were largely absent in the big city. Alienated from the regime, their parents, and "the idiocy of rural life," and unencumbered by the prohibitive costs of maintaining a household or family, young male workers sought autonomy and self-articulation in leisure and style.

Clothing was key. "The tyranny of overalls, loden coat, and cloth cap or beret"[506] was imposed by the regime, but it was also based on the clothing worn by the pre-war working class. As Stuart Hebdige notes, style in subculture "is pregnant with significance. Its transformations go 'against nature,' interrupting the process of 'normalization.' As such, they are gestures, movements towards a speech which offends the 'silent majority,' which challenges the principle of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus."[507] The *jampec* solution was anything plaid,

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[505] Kenez, p. 35, and László Varga, "The Devastation of Budapest in War and Its Role in the Revolution, 1945-1956," in András Gerő and János Poór, editors, *Budapest: A History from its Beginnings to 1998* (Boulder: Social Scince Monographs, 1997), p. 191.
[506] Tibor Valuch, "A Cultural and Social History of Hungary, 1948-1990," in László Kósa, editor, *A Cultural History of Hungary in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Budapest: Corvina, 2000), p. 280.
[507] Hebdige, *Subculture*, p. 18l.

checkered, striped, or otherwise eye-catching; thick-soled crepe shoes ("three-story shoes," in one account); loud 'American' ties.[508] Drainpipe trousers (*csőnadrág*) were definitely the norm, as were the crepe-soled shoes; above the waist, however, the descriptions vary wildly. The lack of consensus among the descriptions suggests that there was no specific *jampec* clothing style: the subculture's sartorial character was defined primarily by the presence of jarring or discordant elements—a tie that clashed with the coat, stripes on plaid, and so forth. By 1950 at the latest, these flashy patterns and odd combinations of them had been coded as distinctly 'American.' The play "Wild West" ("*Vadnyugat*"), which ran from March to June of that year at the Vidám theater, saw a veritable explosion of plaids and loud ties on stage. Before "Wild West" was even off the stage it was followed by "Maypole" ("*Májusfa*"), a production put on at the Capital City Variety Peace Barge (a floating theater moored on the Danube) that featured Árpád Latabár as a plaid-clothed, "America-struck" (*amerikaörűlt*) hooligan.[509] It seems likely that the *jampec* seized upon this flashy and distinctive style; that these appropriations were in turn labeled 'American' by the communist media; and, in turn, the *jampec* celebrated their 'Americanness' as a refusal of regime norms.

These aliens from a cosmopolitan planet also spoke their own language, danced wildly, and talked back to policemen.[510] In the *jampi* lexicon, Budapest was 'the big

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[508] On 'three-story shoes,' see OSA/RFE Items 6797/56, mf 71. Although a comparative analysis is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is interesting to note that *jampec* style is quite similar to that of the English 'Ted' or 'Teddy Boy.' Oddly enough, the *jampecek* seem to have emerged slightly earlier than their English counterparts, who were first noted by the English press only in 1953 (Hall and Jefferson, p. 85).

[509] "Vadnyugat bemutató a Vidám Szinházban," *Szinház es Mozi*, 3 April 1950, "Majusfa: 'Ki jól végzete dolgát, az vigan táncol polkát,'" *Szinház es Mozi*, 7 May 1950.

[510] See the 23-page slang dictionary appended to OSA/RFE Items 2619/55, mf 52; an article mocking their speech, "A nyelvrontókról," appears in *Esti Budapest*, 28 June 1955.

village' ('*a nagyfalu*'), and money, 'lard' ('*zsir*'). Some of their slang terms—such as 'massive' ('*massziv*') denoting 'good'—were drawn from the preexisting criminal argot, or '*csibésznyelv*'.[511] Others were parodic riffs on life under communism: Zoltan Vas was known as "the thief of Baghdad," Jászai Mari square as "ÁVÓ Maria square."[512] Women were objectified with abandon: while '*krina*' (also '*krinolin*'—derived from 'crinoline') denoted women in general, prostitutes were referred to as "female athletes," and pregnant women, "melons."[513] Drinking, dancing, various criminal activities and the authorities each had three or four slang equivalents. Not surprisingly, the hooligan argot was also known as *jassznyelv*, or "jazz-language." The remaining elements of *jampec* identity centered around dancing 'in the American style,' trying to pick up girls, and mouthing off to authority figures, all of which are apparent in the accounts cited above.

These were young men the communist media loved to hate. These shifty, foppish, criminal young louts provided a stark counterpoint to the fresh-faced young students, workers, and soldiers who served as the poster-boys for the communist future. All these characteristics—not least the linkages between the *jampec* and 'cosmopolitan,' western culture—were repeatedly pilloried in the pages of *Esti Budapest*. In one *jampec* caricature, he is depicted carrying a cowboy novel.[514] In another the scalper of tickets to a popular movie was, predictably, "a young man in a corduroy coat and drainpipe trousers, swiftly turning to and fro in his thick-soled shoes." (In the latter case, the author

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[511] A much less extensive dictionary of prison slang is appended to OSA/RFE Items 3032/54, mf 36.
[512] Zoltán Vas (1903-1983) was a Muscovite communist who served as general secretary of the economic council and then as the president of the National Planning Office. Jaszai Mári square was briefly the home of the ÁVÓ before it moved to the famous building on Andrássy street: anyone taken to the building would, presumably, 'sing' (i.e. confess).
[513] '*atletánő*' and '*dinnyés*,' respectively.
[514] "Hát ilyen is van még?," *Esti Budapest*, 4 August 1952.

goes on to aver that this young deviant was also acting as the lookout man for a gang of thieves preying on moviegoers.)[515] The cinema also jumped on the *jampec*-bashing bandwagon. The archetypal film *jampec* is "Swing Toni," played by Imre Pongrácz (who, incidentally, had acted one of the hooligan roles in the aforementioned "Wild West" production) in Márton Keleti's classic *Dalolva Szép az Élet*, or "Singing Makes Life Beautiful" (1950). Swing Toni is arrogant, a slacker at work, a dandy in his spare time, and a petty thief. He competes with the stalwart Feri Torma (Imre Sóos) for the attentions of the lovely Zsóka (Violetta Ferrari), a prim kindergarten teacher at the Vác factory crèche, and one of the younger workers, Pisti, follows him around and is obviously in danger of succumbing to the temptations of hooliganism. At one point Zsóka seeks him out in a dancing school (*tánziskola*): inside, Toni and a disheveled crowd of youngsters are dancing like mad to a trio blowing hot jazz. Of course, in the end Zsóka chooses Feri Torma, and Pisti abandons Swing Toni when his thievery is revealed: neither crime nor jitterbugging paid in communist Hungary.

These popularized accounts of hooliganism reveal just how closely cultural life in communist Hungary was monitored, and the significance of this deviant youth stereotype as a means of social control. In high schools, the behavior and dress of both male and female students were closely monitored for hooliganistic tendencies.[516] Youths with *jampec* hairstyles or clothing were not allowed in the more class-conscious *tánziskolak* feted in *Esti Budapest*. In these schools, trying to sneak in one or two swing steps or

[515] "Hány jegyet parancsolnak?," *Esti Budapest*, 26 September 1953.
[516] MOL M-KS-276. 88. / 849 ő.e., "Feljegyzés az MTH I. számu intézetének nevelő munkájáról," 5 November 1952, n.p.

other risqué moves were adequate grounds for getting kicked off the dance floor.[517] Factories, workers' hostels, bars and dancehalls were also under regular and intrusive surveillance, and this intimate policing of the social and cultural sphere extended to noting even the faintest transgressions in clothing, hairstyle, or comportment. One 21-year old farmboy from Tiszapolgar who escaped in 1953 recalled how the local DISz secretary would level the charge of 'hooliganism' or 'cosmopolitanism' against anyone who "danced elegantly or made some new steps while dancing."[518] A young 1956 émigré concurred on the possible penalties of misbehaving in this manner:

> [T]hey persecuted the hooligans and attacked western dances and cosmopolitanism.… Some young people were expelled from DISZ because they danced the so-called hooligan or jampec dances. Young workers didn't care about this because they could always find a job somewhere else.[519]

Note, also, the clothing actually worn by the Debrecen hooligan cited above: his sandals, checkered shirt, and regular trousers bear very little resemblance to *jampi* style. As Horváth argues, the *jampec* stereotype was used by the regime to keep the majority of Hungarian youths in line: even the slightest transgression could be seized upon as evidence of hooliganism. The irony here is that just as there was some truth to the stereotype—some *jampec* were indeed also thugs and thieves—so was there some justifiable cause for alarm. Even as the communist press lampooned the *jampec* phenomenon, the spectre of juvenile crime was haunting Hungary.

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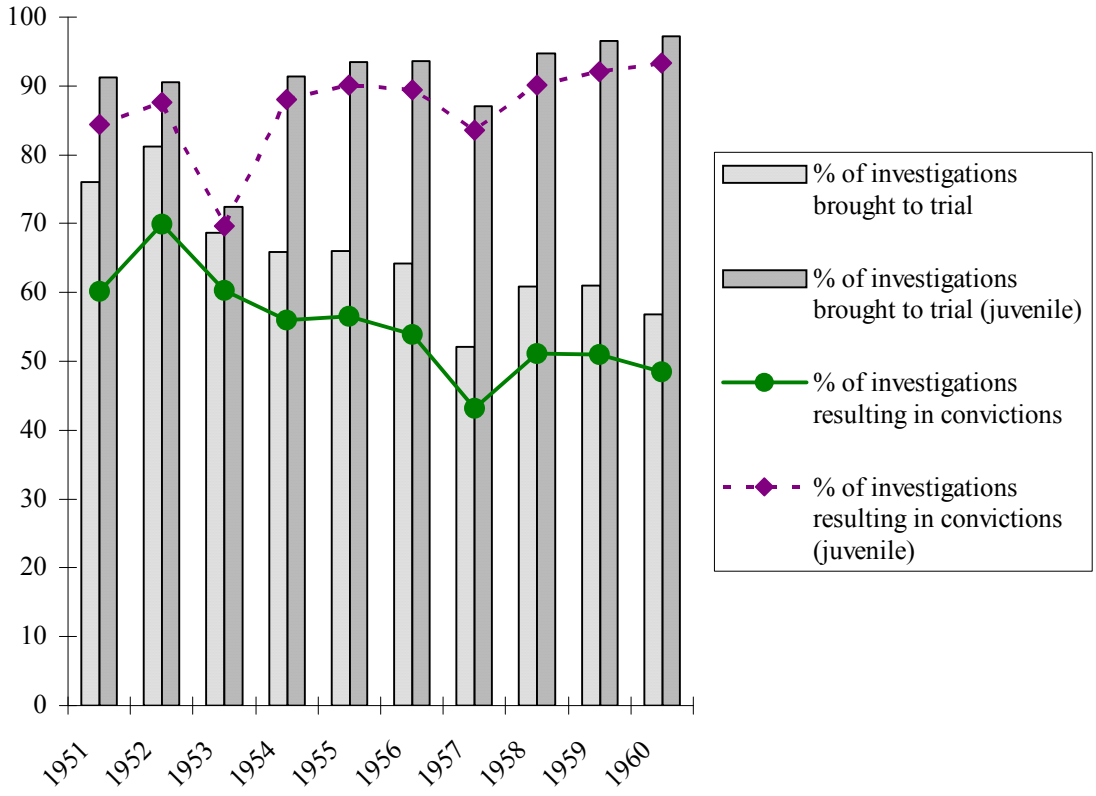
[517] "Egy táncsiskolában," *Esti Budapest*, 6 September 1954; "felbecsülhetetlen érdemek," *Esti Budapest*, 10 May 1955.
[518] OSA.RFE Items 1258/54, mf 34 (In English).
[519] CUHRP Interview 213, Box 11, pp. 52-53.

Chart 4.1. Adult and Juvenile Investigation and Conviction Rates, 1951-1960[520]



The close monitoring of youthful deviance is clearly apparent in the courts' treatment of juvenile crime. Although juvenile crime remains roughly constant at about 5% of the total throughout the period (peaking at 11,700 cases in 1952), its disposition in the courts was significantly different. Once investigated, juveniles were both more likely to be brought to trial and much more likely to be convicted. Whereas after 1952 conviction rates remain below 60% for the general population, for juveniles they return to

[520] Regrettably, juvenile crimes were not counted separately until 1951. Source data: 1949-55, 1957, and 1960 *Statisztikai Évkönyv*, pp. 355-358, 343-346, and 357-363, respectively. For more detailed statistics on crime, see MOL M-KS-276. f. 96(F) / 70 ő.e., passim.

90%—and stay at that high level even after 1956. Although the penalties were not as severe for juveniles as for adults (roughly 40% of the guilty were let off with an admonition or probation), the courts proceeded more industriously against juveniles than against the population as a whole.

Thus for the big picture. A summer 1954 report from the Budapest Public Prosecutor's office to the DISz leadership described youth crime in the capital city in greater detail. Of the 1324 juveniles convicted in the first half of 1954, the majority (70%) were guilty of economic crimes: 481 were guilty of theft and other direct economic crimes against the regime, while 440 had stolen from other people instead of the state. (Theft was also the most common crime in the population at large.) The next largest category (115) were guilty of *közveszélyü munkakerülés*, or "work-shirking in a manner dangerous to the public:" a broad category, in this case meaning primarily vagrancy and prostitution. The remaining 20% were guilty of assault, speculation, and other crimes. 12 youths had been caught carrying a weapon (*fegyverrejtegetés*).[521] The 13th district led Budapest in the number of youth crimes, followed by the 4th and 10th. The public prosecutor went on to note that the 13th was also the leader in incidences of teen prostitution, with almost three times as many cases as any other district. He acidly suggested the district DISz organization look into the matter.[522]

The DISz was already aware of the problem. The 13th district (historically called Angyalföld, or "Angel's Field"), directly north of the city center, had been a working-

[521] Literally "weapons-hoarding"—but this seldom meant an actual cache of weapons. Penalties for this crime were strict: in one 1951 Szeged case, a market vendor caught with a loaded revolver was sentenced to 2 ½ years in jail. MOL M-KS 276. f. 96 (Iü) / 8 ő.e., p. 72a.
[522] BFL XXXV. 95. e / 103 ő.e., memo dated 9 August 1954.

class suburb since the middle of the 19th century. Angyalföld was one of the epicenters of the industrializing project: it boasted the large Láng turbine factory as well as a number of mechanical and chemical plants, and the large United Electrical (*Egyesült Izzó*) works in neighboring Újpest employed thousands more. As these hordes converged on the 13th district, it was DISz's responsibility to educate the young workers; naturally, this task included monitoring their behavior in the factories and workers' hostels. By March 1954, something was obviously rotten in Angel's Field.

Every one of the confidential factory and hostel reports decried the *jampec* threat. According to a DISz report on the Láng factory, the young workers acted rudely to their elders, and generational strife in the workforce was apparent. However, this paled in comparison to how they spent their spare time:

> After work most of the youths pass their time with their circle of friends. What are these circles like? Many of the Angyalföld youth are in gangs. … many of the youth complain that they can't really have a good time at the factory culture club. Lots of *jampi* go there, and their fights often put a stop to the fun. …[523]

A DISz report from the Gheorghiu-Dei shipyard (in another district) noted the steady encroachment of hooliganism there as well. According to this report, the young workers at this factory regularly went around to places *jampecek* were known to hang out—including the Tripoli, the bar described in detail above. Young workers freshly arrived from the countryside, not knowing what to do in their spare time, were constantly falling in with this bad crowd. According to this report, the numbers of vagrants and hooligans

[523] MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 849 ő.e., "Jelentés a Láng-gyárban végzett munkánk tapasztalatairól," 2 March 1954, n.p.

among the young workers was increasing despite the best efforts of the youth organization and factory committee. (Incidentally, this report also remarks on the high degree of animosity apparent between the older and younger workers.)[524] The *jampecek* were also portrayed as a threat to the virtue of their female companions. Another DISz report, this one on an Angyalföld girls' hostel, stressed that a number of the girls had recently arrived there from a reformatory, where they had been doing time for vagrancy. Not surprisingly, these deviant girls were judged by the company they kept:

> In the sphere of moral instruction there is a serious problem, as several of these morally debauched girls provide a bad example for the virtuous ones. These girls are acquainted with quite a large number of *jampec*; they meet them in the evenings in front of the hostel, and are often disorderly in the street.… a regular police watch should be posted in front of the hostel.[525]

These are much more menacing *jampec* than those pilloried in the pages of *Esti Budapest* earlier in the 1950s, and they now surface in the administrative transcript—as the reason for DISz's failure to convert the youth to the communist cause. As Corey Ross argues for the *jampec*'s East German counterparts, "instead of recognizing this fascination with western culture … as an *expression* of youthful rebelliousness or an iconoclastic disaffection with constant calls to 'work, learn, and struggle' for the glory of socialism, officials rather regarded it as the *source* of these problems."[526] It is an open question

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[524] MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 849 ő.e., "Feljegyzés a Gheorghiu Dej Hajógyár DISz szervezetenek munkájáról," 10 June 1954, n.p. The Gheorgiu-Dej shipyard had previously come to DISz's attention because of high workforce turnover among its younger workers—see MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 849 ő.e., "Feljegyzés a Gheorghiu Dej Hajógyár DISz szervezetenek munkájáról," 21 November 1953, n.p.

[525] MOL M-KS-276. f. 88 / 849 ő.e., "Jelentés a Huba utcai és Vag utcai MTH intézetekben folyo nevelő munkáról," 2 March 1954, n.p.

[526] Ross, *Constructing Socialism at the Grass Roots*, p. 140.

what steps the regime could have taken to reduce the social tensions resulting from its high-modernist scheme; that youthful deviance and juvenile crime were simply blamed on hooligans and the West ensured that no such measures were even conceptualized. Perhaps the only success the regime enjoyed in combating hooliganism was that its anti-hooligan propaganda did not fall entirely only on deaf ears. In addition to the real economic threat the young generation coming of age under communism posed its elders, there seems to have been a widespread notion that it was morally corrupt. As a result, to some extent the regime succeeded in linking the supposed moral decay of the youth with this form of subcultural deviance.

As with women's reproduction in the previous chapter, the regime's policy jibed with an underlying social division—a generational one, in this case. Long before communism reached Hungary, its deracinated sexuality and retro-Victorian morality had been codified in its Soviet context. In a famous polemic, Lenin squared off against Alexandra Kollontai (1873-1952), one of the main (and only) women thinkers of the Bolshevik party, on the issue of "proper" sexuality in a socialist system. Kollontai argued that in a socialist society, men and women should free themselves of their bourgeois notions of sin and instead engage in (hetero-)sexual relations as they desired. She saw sexual desire as a natural and healthy function of the human organism, no more remarkable than hunger or thirst. Lenin's crude response—"would a normal person lie down in the gutter and drink from a puddle?"—carried the day, and set the tone for the relationship between communism and sexuality in the USSR in the decades to come. Although Soviet women acquired many legal rights denied them under the tsarist regime—primarily divorce, alimony, and abortion—they were not allowed the same

degree of sexual freedom that men practiced as a matter of course: Kollontai's "winged eros" of socialized sexuality remained unrealized in the USSR.[527] The family remained the basic unit of social organization, while free love retained its pejorative connotation of promiscuity instead of acquiring a new ideological rectitude.

In this regard the stubborn persistence of Catholicism in Hungary was multivalent. Although Catholicism did serve as a locus of resistance to the regime in a broader social sense, it also condemned premarital sex, as it does to this day. Although the theoretical basis of this prudery was vastly different, these two ideological systems—ardently opposed on practically every other issue (abortion policy being the other notable exception)—concurred on this point. Thus, much as the success of the pronatalist drive hinged upon the underlying patriarchal (and Catholic) norm, so did the success of anti-hooligan propaganda draw on a sympathetic indigenous morality as well as the aforementioned generation gap.

Morals did indeed become looser in communist Hungary. Many of the factors that contributed to the erosion of sexual morality in communist Hungary were due the regime's own actions; however, this did not stop the older generation from blaming its wayward youth for their immoral tendencies. In the first place, the strict moral code of the village did not follow its emigrants to the cities. There, the hordes of young workers lived in workers' hostels—like the one described above—in which their sexual behavior was poorly monitored. As suggested in Chapter 3, the mobilization of women in the

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[527] László Kürti, "The Wingless Eros of Socialism: Nationalism and Sexuality in Hungary," in Hermine G. DeSoto and David G. Anderson, editors, *The Curtain Rises: Rethinking Culture, Ideology, and the State in Eastern Europe* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1993), pp. 266-289. On the USSR, see Goldman, pp. 1-58.

workforce led to increased opportunities for casual sexual liaisons with co-workers. While the regime was only indirectly responsible for increased immorality in these regards, its pronatalist campaign almost certainly resulted in an increase in sexual behavior among youths. As we also saw in Chapter 3, regime propaganda proclaimed that "For girls it is an honor to have children," thus directly encouraging underage (and unmarried) sexual behavior. While some adult Magyars blamed the regime for this decrease in morality—and some even asserted that it was a deliberate goal of the communists, enacted in order to sever familial bonds—most held the youths responsible for their increased sexual activity. Hooligans became associated with this debauchery not only in regime propaganda but also in the popular imagination.

> I had a friend in Budapest who was a big hooligan, a bus driver who made 2,000 to 3,000 [forints] a month. He said that if one appeared with a car one could choose between four and five terrific girls. They did it just for the entertainment, not for money.

Elsewhere this same respondent suggests the linkage between these loose women and prostitution: "The girls started out doing it just for fun and for gifts and as they got used to it they did it for money. I heard from friends that you could get a girl for 80 forints."[528] It seems likely that girls who went out with hooligans would appear in the official transcript—and in the eyes of their elders—as prostitutes regardless of whatever they might have been doing with them. Finally, the loose morality of the Magyar youth was apparent in how casually young men and women interacted and spoke to each other. As one middle-aged 1956 émigré recalled,

[528] CUHRP Interview 229, Box 12, pp. 32, 30.

> I felt like putting cotton in my little Ildiko's and Elvirka's ears when going on the street we would hear the following conversation: "*Szevasz* (hi!)" followed by a big slap on the shoulder, this slap coming from a boy toward a girl, mind you. "*Gyerünk csörögeni*" ("Let's go out dancing"). "*Tudok egy klassz filmet*" ('I know a swell movie"). And then the young "gentleman" would start going with the young "lady" in a way that I could never figure out how they managed to walk, so much were they leaning on each other [sic].[529]

Csörögeni and *klassz* both appear in the *jampec* lexicon.

In light of these cultural, social, and sexual concerns, it is not surprising that the hooligans in a later film are much more sinister than Swing Toni. In Félix Máriássy's *Egy Pikoló Világos* ("A Glass of Beer," 1955), hooliganism symbolizes not only the degenerative effects of cosmopolitanism but sexual danger as well. The plot runs as follows: Juli (Éva Ruttkai) and Marci (Tibor Bitskey) are a young couple in love. They are separated when Marci goes off to the army. In his absence, Juli works in a factory but spends her evenings drinking and dancing with her promiscuous friend Gizus (Éva Schubert). Their favorite dancehall is also frequented by a trio of pouting and posturing *jampecek*, who regularly ask her to dance.[530] When Marci returns on leave, he finds out what Juli has been up to and forces her to take him to the dancehall, where everybody seems to know her name. He berates her for her behavior and, when one of the shifty young hooligans asks her to dance, ignores her entreaties to step in and claim her as his partner. What ensues is one of the more disturbing scenes in socialist realist cinema. The

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[529] CUHRP Interview 411, Box 13, p. 14. Herein I have taken the liberty of correcting the rough translations in the original text, which read "Let's go and rattle our old bones!" and "I know a classy, topping movie."

[530] Those viewers who recalled Imre Pongracz's turn as Swing Toni in *Dalolva Szép az Élet* would have noted his minor role in this film: he appears intermittently as an aging rake who also makes advances to Juli.

other *jampecek* crowd around the dancing couple and, when she tries to stop dancing, force her to continue. In what is nothing less than a stylized gang rape on the dance floor, the young toughs pass her back and forth, forcing her to dance faster all the while. Juli is helpless, and swoons. Marci finally rescues Juli, the *jampecek* are detained by the police, and the movie ends 'happily:' after briefly considering suicide, Juli decides to mend her ways and Marci takes her back. Despite its ideological bombast, the movie's narrative neatly frames the sexualized threat posed by cosmopolitan culture: the site of this debauchery is the dancehall, the vector of perversion dancing to western music, the actual instrument thereof the *jampec*. Whereas hooliganism was initially mobilized by the communist regime for comedic effect, these later manifestations were distinctly more threatening—on film as well as in the factories, streets, and bars.

By early 1956, political tensions in Hungary were steadily mounting. Rákosi's return to hardline communism in the wake of Nagy's New Course News of Khrushchev's Secret Speech at the 20th Party Congress in February reached Hungary in March. Soon after, the Petőfi circle—initially a small gathering of students and intellectuals—began its discussions on literature and other topics that soon snowballed into not-so-thinly-veiled critiques of the Rákosi regime.[531] It was closed down, but not before its last meetings had drawn crowds numbering in the thousands. By summer tensions had reached the breaking-point: Rákosi himself was ousted in favor of the slightly-less-hated Erno Gerő as the party scrambled to maintain its authority.

[531] György Litván, editor, *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956*, pp. 37, 39-41.

This retrenchment manifested immediately on the popular-cultural front. In June, dance teachers were allowed to teach western dances as well. In August, the DISz newspaper ran a front-page story entitled "Waltz, Rumba, Mambo, Without Hooliganism," explaining that these dances are acceptable as long as they are danced with reserve and taste. Ten days later, Kossuth Radio (one of the regime mouthpieces) broadcast a three-hour program of the latest western dance and jazz music.[532] However, even as the proscriptions on youthful activities were relaxed, the demonization of the *jampec* subculture continued apace. In mid-August, a gang of four hooligans who went by the nicknames "Kiri," "Guca," "Csicsa," and "Boci" were tried for their criminal activities at the Harkányfürdő spa. The *jampecek* had lured a 15-year old girl into their room, where one of them raped her while the others stood guard; a few days later the rapist stabbed a man over the girl.[533] "Kiri," the rapist, got eight years in prison; the others, a year and a half or less. On the eve of the revolution, the *jampec* had transformed from a useful propaganda stereotype into a real folk devil.

* * *

Communism never managed to kill jazz in Hungary, but rock and roll accomplished what the party ideologues could not. By the time the dust had settled after 1956, jazz was already old hat. The first rock and roll recording in Hungary, a cover of Bill Haley's "Rock around the Clock," was recorded in March 1957—less than three

[532] Cited in OSA/RFE 6084/56, mf 70.

years after its release in the USA—by none other than Lajos Martiny. Tiny Matton had weathered stalinism in Hungary better than many musicians. Although his performing career was put on hold, 88 albums recorded during the period 1951-1956 bear his imprint as a composer, studio musician, or director. Chappy likewise persevered, playing a steady gig throughout the 1950s at the Budapest club in Nagymezző street (formerly, and now once more, known as the "Moulin Rouge")[534] and resuming his jazz career in the relaxed era of the 1960s. After 1956, the character of the *jampec* likewise modulated, taking on rock and roll as the musical idiom of their youthful dissent. Juvenile crime continued to be closely monitored, and Angyalföld continued to be a thorn in the regime's side, as evinced by its preeminence in a citywide sweep of youth gangs in 1960-61.[535]

By this time, however, the Hungarian regime had learned its lesson. Although it still demonized juvenile criminals as hooligans, it allowed a remarkable degree of independence and creativity to flourish in youth culture. In this less oppressive environment, jeans and Western-style rock and roll did not draw the same opprobrium that drainpipe trousers and the boogie-woogie had in the 1950s. As a result, youthful dissent remained for the most part muted until the late 1970s. At that time, punk rock finally crossed the Iron Curtain into the Eastern Bloc. As in the West, punk rock

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533 *Dunantuli Naplo*, 16 August 1956.
534 Nemes, "Martiny Lajos," *Fejezetek*, pp. 172, 188. On Chappy at the Budapest club, see "Idegen nevek útvesztőjében," *Esti Budapest*, 14 October 1952.
535 Horváth, "Hooligans, Spivs, and Gangs," pp. 209-210.

articulated a rabid and foulmouthed attack on the establishment.[536] Recorded in 1981, CPg's "Anarchy" exhibits a clear debt to the Sex Pistols' "Anarchy in the U.K." even as it delivers a scathing attack on the administration:

> I am the antichrist
> I already know what you don't
> Anarchy is coming now
>
> Anarchy, oi oi!
>
> To be free is what I want
> Not governed by an imbecilic beast
> This is proper I'm sure of it
>
> Anarchy, oi oi![537]

For this and other songs like it, the members of CPg were jailed, fined, and put under surveillance.[538] Other punk bands such as Kontroll Csoport, ETA, and Európa Kiadó also explicitly attacked the communist regime, its Soviet allies, the excessive regimentation of work and leisure, and everything else wrong with communist Hungary. This unique form of resistance outlasted the regime it railed against. However, the regime was not the only target of these angry young men:

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[536] Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1990). On the Hungarian punk rock scene, see Ádam Pozsonyi, *A Lenin-Szobor Helyén Bombatölcsér Tátong: A Magyar Punk Története, 1978-1990* (Budapest: Mucsa Könyvék, 2003).
[537] CPg, "Anarchia," *Embör Vigyázz!* (1982).
[538] Kürti, "Culture, Youth, and Musical Opposition in Hungary," in *Rocking the State*, edited by Ramet, p. 89.

> The flamethrower is the only weapon I need to win
> All the Gypsy adults and children we'll exterminate
> But we can kill all of them at once in unison
> When it's done we can advertise: Gypsy-free zone.[539]

The neo-Nazi group Mos-oi and others like it articulated not only anti-establishment angst, but also the anti-Roma sentiment that percolated throughout the communist period. The fall of communism also led to an increase in skinhead attacks on Roma, which peaked sharply in 1991-92 and have since remained a major problem for post-communist Hungary.[540] Like jazz, the punk rock scene in Hungary was a subculture generated by underlying social tensions that adopted a Western idiom for their expression. However, it provides a cautionary tale about interpreting a subcultural formation in an authoritarian context as a straightforward instance of resistance. Although the punk scene opened up a discursive space for criticizing the regime, this newfound freedom of expression was also used to rearticulate existing ethnicized biases. In this case, one of the freedoms wrestled from the state was the freedom to indulge in hate speech.

To return to the 1950s, the *jampecek* pose a similar interpretive problem. In the context of hooliganism's relationship to resistance, we must note that a few of the Columbia interviewees suggested that 'hooligans' were among the most fearless of street fighters of 1956.[541] Bill Lomax argues that

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[539] Cited in Kürti, "Culture, Youth, and Musical Opposition in Hungary," in *Rocking the State*, edited by Ramet, p. 85.
[540] Human Rights Watch, *Rights Denied: The Roma of Hungary* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1996), p. 12.
[541] See, e.g., CUHRP Interview 100, Box 7, p. 29.

> More prominent [than the students] amongst those who took up the fight against the Russian tanks were the rough, working-class youths of the Budapest slums, the tough-guys, leather-jacketed "yobos" and hooligans from Angyalfold and Ferencvaros. Uncultivated, rude, often anti-semitic, many of them joined for the adventure and sport of the fight.[542]

However, subsequent research into the social backgrounds of the 1956 revolutionaries—most of them young, urban, working-class males—does not indicate a disproportionately higher degree of criminality.[543] What seems more likely is that signifier 'hooligan' became destabilized during the revolution, framing both acts of bravery and whatever isolated instances of anti-Semitism may have occurred: whereas prior to the revolution it was a strictly pejorative label, it came to signify good as well in the revolutionary hurly-burly of late October and early November 1956. The post-1956 regime responded by blaming hooligans, along with other "counterrevolutionary" elements, for the revolution. Already coded as sexual predators and deviant consumers of western culture, hooligans were now recast by regime propaganda as a directly political threat.

The actual intentions of these hooligans, how they perceived their actions, and the effects of their activities are indeterminate. Some might have indulged in this

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[542] Bill Lomax. *Hungary 1956*, p. 111. Although one émigré concurs that hooligans exhibited anti-Semitic tendencies (CUHRP Interview 107, Box 7, p. 14), most accounts do not support this charge of anti-Semitism. To date only David Irving, the infamous Holocaust denier, has argued this case. His tendentious *Uprising!* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981) stresses the Jewish background of many party members, and asserts that much revolutionary violence took on an anti-Semitic cast as a result. His argument therein suffers from his ideological bias, his lack of knowledge of Hungarian history (or language, for that matter), and by his lack of scholarly objectivity. In 1994, András Mink discovered that Irving had essentially sold out to the Communist regime in order to gain preferential treatment and access to interviewees, promising not only to incorporate the regime's version of events but also to turn over classified documents from American, English, and West German archives. Mink, "David Irving and the 1956 Revolution," *Hungarian Quarterly*, Volume XLI, Number 160 (Winter 2000), available online at http://hungarianquarterly.com/no160/117.html (viewed 1 December 2007).

cosmopolitan form of deviance as a form of rebellion against the state; some were merely rebelling against their parents; most were probably just out looking for a good time. Initially, they seem to have served the regime well as propaganda whipping-boys. Their elders, although they shared their cosmopolitan taste in music, saw in them a threat to public morality. However, as time went on the hooligan problem got worse, as evinced by the spread of the moral panic to the administrative transcript. It seems likely that the bad press hooligans received actually *encouraged* more youthful deviance throughout the early 1950s. As with *magzatelhajtás*, to the extent hooliganism constituted resistance it was not only to the regime but also to a major segment of society—in this case, the older generation.

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[543] On this point see Gati, *Failed Illusions*, p. 157, and László Eőrsi, *Corvinistak 1956* (Budapest: 1956 Institute, 2001), p. 13.

CONCLUSION: 1956

> It is the tragic irony of terror that by the expansion of regulation, less becomes enough for breaking the rule. Acts that do not have any political significance under more democratic conditions are labeled and treated as serious political actions in a centralized system. In this sense, the expansion of coercion creates more room for resistance.[544]

In this minimalist sense, everyday crime *was* popular resistance. Although the communist regime in Hungary was not 'totalitarian,' its aspirations certainly were. The party-state was bent on transforming Hungary in accordance with its high-modernist scheme. To this end, it drastically altered the legal system in accordance with its stalinist precepts of "socialist legality." In the context of communist criminology and the ongoing transformation of society, workplace theft and dissimulation, black-marketeering, arson, wood theft, pig-killing, prostitution, abortion, and hooliganism became something more than mere nuisances. If we are willing to accept Scott's dictum that "each of the forms of disguised resistance, of infrapolitics, is the silent partner of a loud form of public resistance,"[545] then each of these modes of deviant behavior was indeed a surreptitious attack on the party-state's authority. The problem with this borderline-tautological formulation is threefold: it reduces resistance to only those acts recognized by the state as crimes, it assumes oppositional intent on the part of resistors, and the causal relationship between infrapolitics and revolutionary politics is based entirely on inference. What are we to make of cases in which resistance went unnoticed (as was probably the case with

[544] István Rév, "The Advantages of being Atomized," p. 347.
[545] Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 199.

much workplace theft) or cases in which resistance may not have been the primary, or possibly even a significant, motive (as with black-marketeering and pig-killing)? In any case, what is the linkage between these subtle arts of resistance and the brief episode of outright armed rebellion in 1956?

As I have demonstrated herein, criminal and deviant behavior in communist Hungary were responses to regime oppression, but also to deeper social forces at work. Resentment against the communist regime was a major ingredient in the criminal mix, but the underlying social, cultural, and economic dislocation resulting from the modernization of Hungary was also a significant factor. The dissolution of the conservative Horthy regime and the postwar consensus on the necessity for change made possible the transformation of the country along high-modernist lines. Modernization was the order of the day well before the Party seized control: the postwar coalition government was already proceeding in this direction, with broad popular support, well before the 1948 coup. Peasants left their farms in search of wage labor in factories even as women and youths entered the workforce in much greater numbers than ever before. The vast majority of Magyars found themselves working longer hours for less money than they had before the war. Some degree of societal tension and dislocation was bound to happen in the course of this project, and any postwar government would have had to deal with these issues. The stalinist variant of high modernity imposed on Hungary both exacerbated these modernizing tensions and directed popular dissatisfaction with them directly back at the state.

The state's ability to deal with these various transgressions and force its project through was constrained by two main factors: the nature of communist authority itself,

and its tension-fraught relationship with its subjects. On the former count, serious problems surfaced with both the planning and the personnel involved in the stalinization of Hungary. Even if it had not been altered on a daily basis, the Five-Year Plan was an overly ambitious scheme. It would have required accurate information reported at all levels of the economy to even track its progress, much less intervene in a constructive manner. As the case of the collective farm manager M.T. showed, penalties for failure to live up to these impossible standards could be severe. For workers at all levels of the administrative hierarchy, dissimulation and falsifying data were the safest options. They were widely practiced, and in collusion with fellow workers, on a daily basis. In some cases, the impact of these *sub rosa* practices were negligible: as the electrical engineer in Chapter 1 recalled, none of the construction plans he generated were ever used anyway. In others—as with the managers of collective farms sending their machines on mad jaunts across the countryside in the interest of falsifying their inventories rather than agricultural development—this preoccupation with quotas and production data actually militated directly against the plan. Perhaps most importantly, the members of the legal administration were not immune to these personal and infrapolitical motives: policemen and judges, like engineers and tractor-station managers, were far from reliable executors of the regime's intentions. As its grandiose scheme was characterized by poor planning, unreliable cadres, and poor communication between its offices, the system itself bred the behaviors it then interpreted as resistance.

In addition to this intrinsic tendency towards entropy, the communist system was often confounded by preexisting modes of social, cultural, and economic organization. For the Soviet case, Lynne Viola has recently argued that "The great irony of

resistance—or what the state chose to see as resistance—is that its identification as such in combination with the state's repression led to the strengthening of older cultural formations, identities, and loyalties."[546] The same irony is apparent in stalinist Hungary. Perhaps the best example of this stubborn persistence of the past was the state's attempt to regulate pig-killing: the widespread, traditional, and previously-legal cultural activity provided a locus of anti-regime activity. Traditional peasant practices of resistance such as wood theft and withholding grain also continued largely unabated in the communist period, as did working-class organization, Catholicism, and the consumption of "cosmopolitan" culture. The shadow economy flourished under communism, encouraging a hypercapitalist mindset among the subjects of this ostensibly-centralized economy. For the most part, these underlying forms of social, cultural, and economic organization hampered the successful realization of the party-state's plans.

This was not always the case. A necessary clarification of Viola's point is that these submerged social and cultural norms could also aid some aspects of the communist project. This is most clearly evident in the nominal success of the pronatalist campaign. Although women were still able to control their reproduction to some degree throughout the entire period, the recrudescence of patriarchy was a key element in the 'success' of the administration's population policy. Likewise, the moral panic preached against hooliganism successfully drew upon the perceived immorality of the younger generation. The persistence of Catholic religious practice is especially interesting in this regard, as it lent itself to both resistance and complicity: on the issues of abortion and abstinence, at least, a good Catholic could also be a good communist. Women who sought to control

[546] Viola, "Popular Resistance in the Stalinist 1930s," p. 41.

their reproduction resisted against both the law and patriarchal social norms, just as hooligans found themselves rebelling against not only regime-sanctioned notions of proper leisure activities but also the strict morality of their parent generation.

Gender and generational conflicts aside, however, most Hungarians identified communism as an unwelcome regulating body of foreign origin, and reacted accordingly. The net effect of this widespread resistance in the longer term was a qualified victory. The crackdown after the 1956 revolution lasted into the early 1960s. During this time collectivization was finally completed, and the state crushed all open challenges to its authority, albeit in a more selective manner (see Chart 1.1). However, after 1963 the party-state gradually ushered in significant changes. Small-scale private production and retail trade became legal once more, privately-owned household plots were allowed, the cultural sphere was policed more leniently. By 1968, the Hungarian economy was a mongrel mix of centralized planning and certain elements of a free market. This is the point at which Hungary's history significantly diverges from that of its Eastern European neighbors, as the reforms ushered in an era of relative prosperity. Hungary became "the happiest barracks in the Bloc" even as the other states of Eastern Europe remained wedded to a more doctrinaire communism.

In this regard, the parallels with the other Eastern European communist regimes are instructive. In each, the communist leadership sought to transform society and regulate the labor, reproduction, and leisure of their subjects. In each, similar and even identical modes of criminal behavior emerged as responses to the intrusive party-state. The few differences were primarily matters of timing and degree. In the field of labor relations, subtle shop floor machinations appear to have been endemic throughout the

Bloc. Although outright strikes were rare occurrences everywhere in communist Eastern Europe, slowdowns and factory theft—and even a limited and hidden form of working-class solidarity—were commonplace. For Poland, Kenney has found that "the state's apparent victory" was "subtly altered by the ways in which workers resisted or accommodated to change." The same holds true for the DDR, where, according to Ross, "the *cumulative* effect of decades of small-scale acts of refusal, especially concerning the regime's demands in the work sphere, nonetheless [i.e., despite the absence of open rebellion between 1953 and 1989] appear highly significant over the long term."[547] Peasant resistance was also common throughout Eastern Europe: in the cases of Poland and Yugoslavia, it was so widespread and effective that collectivization was abandoned in the 1950s.[548] Overall, the later history of communism in Eastern Europe seems to support Scott's argument on the infrapolitical impact of shop floor and peasant resistance. As Rév asserts, "From a closer look, all the important and long-lasting economic and social reforms in all the Central European countries appear as nothing but the legalization of already existing illegal or semilegal practices."[549] As they manipulated the system on a daily basis, workers and peasants alike were able to gradually and incrementally over time redress their grievances and advance their interests.

Hungary's tumultuous history of reproductive rights was likewise mirrored in the other states of Eastern Europe. As the demographic effects of the double burden became apparent, almost every one of the Eastern European states opted for the same carrot-and-

[547] Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*, pp. 343-344; Ross, *The East German Dictatorship*, p. 124. Italics in the original.
[548] For Yugoslavia, see Bokovoy, *Peasants and Comunists*, p. 157.
[549] Rév, "The Advantages of being Atomized," p. 324.

stick approach—of providing rewards for having children, and imposing stringent penalties for abortion—that determined reproductive policy in stalinist Hungary. (We should note also that abortion was illegal prior to communist rule in almost every one of these countries; as in Hungary, the limitation of reproductive freedom was a return to patriarchy rather than a communist innovation.) In most Bloc countries this was a short-lived experiment that lasted no later than the 1950s. The exception to this norm, and the most intrusive policing of women's bodies in Eastern Europe, occurred in Romania: abortion was banned from 1948 to 1957, legal until 1966, and, as the birthrate continued to dwindle, banned again in 1966. It remained illegal until 1989, by which time most Romanian women had undergone between five and seven abortions regardless. As in any society, banning abortion did not abolish it but merely drove it underground, with predictable results for the health of the women trying to control their reproduction: maternal deaths skyrocketed to 204 per 100,000 in 1988.[550] In one of the many ironies attendant on the fall of communism, the anti-politics of anti-feminism have generated a backlash against abortion rights in many of these newly-democratic states. Writing in 1993, Laszlo Kürti observed that "If the current freely elected conservative Hungarian, Romanian, Croatian, and Polish governments have their way, the eastern half of the New European Home will be built of a myriad of crèches and kitchens."[551] It remains to be seen how the politics of reproduction will play out in the post-communist societies of Eastern Europe.

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[550] The rate for the USSR at the time was "only' 10:100,000. Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity*, pp. 208, 213.
[551] Kürti, "Wingless Eros," p. 281.

Finally, culture and leisure were also hotly-contested battlegrounds in each of the Eastern European states. The jazz scene and its subcultural hangers-on were not unique to Hungary. In the early 1950s, jazz reigned supreme in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and even the USSR and Bulgaria as well—and in each country colorfully-named and unruly youth subcultures (*stiliagi* in the USSR, *bikiniarzy* in Poland, etc.) also danced in the American style, incurred the wrath of the authorities, and seized the public imagination.[552] In all these countries, regime control measures were counterproductive: "the continual efforts to increase organization and control as a solution to the problems of youth socialization … in effect only added to the political significance and iconoclastic attraction of Western popular culture, and in the process set an unpromising precedent for efforts to steer young people's interests and free-time activities in the decades to come."[553] In short, similarities between Hungary and the other Eastern European states are apparent in all these categories, in the 1950s as well as thereafter. The question then becomes: if these arts of resistance were common across the Bloc, how and why did they translate into open political rebellion in Hungary in 1956?

Everyday crime in communist Hungary had two subtle but important effects: its prosecution eroded regime legitimacy, and its practice normalized anti-regime activity. As Kenney notes, "Legitimacy's requirements are minimal: some kind of acceptance of

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[552] On jazz and youth subcultures in Czechoslovakia, see OSA/RFE Items 4510/53, mf 23, and OSA/RFE Items 11526/54, mf 47; in East Germany, see 10682/55, mf 76; in Poland, see OSA/RFE Items 1942/54, mf 35, OSA/RFE Items 7236/54, mf 42, OSA/RFE Items 9363/54, mf 43, OSA/RFE Items 654/55, mf 49, and OSA/RFE Items 955/55, mf 76; in Bulgaria, see OSA/RFE Items 5427/54, mf 39. On the *stiliagi,* see Starr, *Red and Hot*, Ch. 5; on the *bikiniarzy*, see Katharine Lebow, "Nowa Huta: Stalinism and the Transformation of Everyday Life in Poland's 'First Socialist City,'" PhD dissertation, Columbia University (2002), especially pp. 218-234. On the *Halbstarken* in both Germanies, see Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels*, especially Chapter 2.

[553] Ross, *Constructing Socialism at the Grass Roots*, p. 142.

the system and the benefits it offers, and resignation from conflict as a means to political change."[554] Whatever fragile legitimacy the Rákosi regime enjoyed disappeared as ordinary Magyars found themselves in jail for acts labeled criminal by the regime, but which they did not perceive as transgressions. Workers, peasants, women, and youths all flaunted the regime's proscriptions on a daily basis—not with intent to overthrow the state, but simply in the course of their daily lives. When they were arrested and jailed, their resentment increased; when they successfully eluded the unwelcome attention of the state's regulatory gaze, the bar was lowered for further deviant behavior. Alone, this undercurrent of popular resentment probably would not have sufficed to bring about the revolution. However, when coupled with the articulation of an oppositional politics by the intelligentsia and the shift in the international context, popular resistance in Hungary coalesced into a revolutionary drive for sweeping social change. Although it is not my intention to entirely rewrite the history of 1956, it is worthwhile to briefly reexamine it in this light.

Popular discontent with the regime began in 1948, but the intelligentsia arrived late to the show. In the period up to mid-1953, the intelligentsia was largely silent even as popular dissatisfaction with the regime reached fever point. This early phase of communism came to an end with Stalin's death. A power struggle in the Kremlin ensued, and the governing elites of the Eastern European party-states were thrown into confusion as the New Course was announced in Moscow. Nikolai Bulganin spelled out the reason for this intervention for Rákosi in no uncertain terms:

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[554] Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*, p. 358.

> [A] catastrophe will occur if we do not improve the situation. The whole situation might be different if the Red Army were not there. It is a fact that elements of power abuse exist; the population's living standard has declined. This is not the road to socialism, but the road to a catastrophe.[555]

Bulganin's fear of widespread social unrest was not unfounded. Destalinization ushered in a series of strikes and demonstrations throughout Eastern Europe: most notably in Eastern Germany, where over 400,000 rioters took to the streets in more than 370 urban areas during the week of 17 June, but also at Plovdiv in Bulgaria, Plzeň, Prague, and Strakonice in Czechoslovakia, and Csepel, Odz, and Diósgyőr in Hungary.[556] This widespread (if disorganized) resistance suggests a region-wide disenchantment with stalinism; in this regard Hungary was the norm rather than the exception, and not even the most rebellious of the Bloc countries at that time.

Rebellion in Hungary was temporarily headed off by the New Course, which successfully defused popular animosities with a raft of economic reforms. However, the New Course was also perceived as a concession by Hungarian workers: as Pittaway asserts, "Whilst the events in the GDR did not lead to open mass protest in Hungary, they had an electrifying effect in workplaces. The notion that a population could express its discontent openly in a socialist state began, albeit slowly, to lift the lid on a well of discontent."[557] At the same time the New Course provided the diathesis for the revolt of the intelligentsia. The general amnesty resulted in the release of thousands of prisoners,

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555 "Notes of a Meeting Between the CPSU CC presidium and a HWP Political Committee delegation in Moscow, 13 June 1953," in Békés, et. al., editors, *The Hungarian Uprising of 1956*, p. 17.

556 Matthew Stibbe, "The SED and the 17 June 1953 Uprising," in McDermott and Stibbe, editors, *Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe*, pp. 43-45, Pittaway, "Control and Consent in Eastern Europe's Workers' States," pp. 346-347, Berend, *Central Europe 1944-1993*, p. 105.

who began telling tales of their torture and mistreatment in captivity. At the same time, loosened press restrictions encouraged writers to take more openly defiant stances against the regime. Even as the masses were temporarily bought off by economic reform, the intelligentsia became ever more intransigent towards the communist system.

Rákosi's return to power in 1955 marked a return to repression. This fueled resistance from all levels of society. A second change in the Kremlin weather, this one occurring in February 1956 as Khrushchev revealed Stalin's sins to the Twentieth Party Congress, ushered in a second grudging wave of reform. As we have seen in Chapter 4, this took the form of increased liberalization on the cultural front. It was also coupled with a liberalization of the public sphere, most notably in the formation of the Petőfi debating circle. These halfhearted reforms only whetted the popular appetite for change.[558] Concession followed concession: Rákosi resigned in July, Laszlo Rajk—the key figure in the 1949 show trial—was properly reburied on 6 October. Prior to 1956, the ebb and flow of popular resistance and articulate dissent had not coincided. This changed in 1955. Thereafter a showdown was all but inevitable, and the presence of the Red Army no longer an adequate deterrent.

The goal of the revolution was clear. As Bill Lomax argues, 1956 "was a social revolution aimed not at restoring a previous régime but at creating a radically new social order, one that would be both more democratic than the capitalist West and more socialist

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[557] Pittaway, "Rethinking the Hungarian Revolution," p. 11.

[558] Scott concurs: "[I]nfrapolitics is ... always pressing, testing, probing the boundaries of the permissible. Any relaxation in surveillance and punishment and foot-dragging threatens to become a declared strike, folktales of oblique aggression threaten to become face-to-face defiant contempt, millennial dreams threaten to become revolutionary politics." *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, pp. 200-201.

than the communist East."[559] The origin of this revolutionary ideal is somewhat more opaque. Imre Nagy, György Lukács, and the other revolutionary thinkers of 1956 all argued for a reform socialism that would redress the ills of the current system without jettisoning it entirely. They framed their critique in the idiom of Marxist philosophy, in essence arguing that Stalin had hijacked the revolution. As Nagy put it, "the economic policy of the New Course is … the proper application of the teachings of Marxism-Leninism to the specific Hungarian conditions, on the basis of specific traits in the transitional period and the objective needs of building socialism in the field of socialist transformation and development of the people's economy."[560] Although most Magyars shared the goal of changing the political system in Hungary, the origin of their political ambition was probably not based in an elite, revisionist stance of the unpopular Communist ideology.

In marked contrast to their nominal revolutionary leaders, ordinary Magyars expressed their ambitions in much simpler terms of which elements of communism they sought to retain and which they sought to jettison. One 1956 émigré told her interviewer that

> As far as the relationships between equals and subordinates and superiors went, I must emphatically say that the Communists have brought some good to Hungary. They have abolished the tremendous class distinctions that existed before the war. They have abolished the stiffness of relations that one experienced whenever approaching superiors.[561]

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[559] Lomax, *Hungary 1956*, p. 17.
[560] Imre Nagy, *On Communism* (New York: Praeger, 1957), p. 81.
[561] CUHRP Interview 108, Box 7, pp. 21-22.

A young factory worker who escaped in 1955 singled out the work-training system introduced by the Communists as a particular benefit to Hungarian youths.[562] Another respondent, a worker and ex-colonel in the army, found that the expansion of public libraries under the communists was a benefit to cultural life, as "people become used to reading and do not stop at the books selected by the party. …The works of Jokai, Eötvös, Mikszath, [563] Balzac, Maupassant, Zola, and Shakespeare can be seen in the hands of real workers and not only those who became unskilled workers under the present regime." He also spoke highly of the various programs geared towards educating and training the youth. Finally, he averred that the bulk of the Hungarian working class felt that

> A planned economy is better than free competition because the latter serves only the interests of the capitalists. This means that they only produce profitable goods instead of what the community needs.[564]

Significantly, many of the post-1956 respondents—interviewed in mid-1957, with the memory of the Soviets' bloody crackdown still fresh—echoed these critical and evenhanded perspectives.[565] These assessments were based on their experience of life under communism, not drawn from reform communist ideology.

All things considered, it seems more likely that the popular revolutionary sentiment in 1956 was based on their preexisting political preferences rather than the intelligentsia's revisionist tendencies. The eradication of social hierarchy, egalitarian access to education and opportunity, a profound wariness of unfettered capitalism: these

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[562] OSA/RFE Items 10256/55, mf 61.
[563] Mór Jókai (1825-1904), József Eötvös (1831-1871), and Kálmán Mikszáth (1847-1910) were all famous Hungarian writers; the first two were also major figures of the 1848 revolution.
[564] OSA/RFE Items 11630/55, mf 62. See also Kracauer, *Satellite Mentality*, pp 82-89.
[565] See, e.g., CUHRP, Box 7, Interview 101, p. 5, and CUHRP, Box 10, Interview 152, pp. 278-280.

were indeed the objectives of Nagy and his reforming cohort—but they were also the goals of the Hungarian public in the immediate postwar period. Although it is possible that ordinary Magyars indeed bought into the intelligentsia's reform program, it seems more likely that they were simply trying to pick up where the ill-starred postwar democratic experiment had left off in 1948. These political beliefs did not evaporate when the Rákosi clique seized power; rather, they went underground. Silenced for almost a decade, in October 1956 the *vox populi* finally got the opportunity to talk back.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Államvédelmi Osztály / Államvédelmi Hatóság (ÁVO / ÁVH)	State Security Department / State Security Authority[566]
Dolgozó Ifjúság Szövetsége (DISz)	Association of Young Workers
feketevágás	illegal slaughter
jampec	hooligan
Magyar Kommunista Párt / *Magyar Dolgozók Pártja* (MKP / MDP)	Hungarian Communist Party / Hungarian Workers' Party[567]
Magyar Nök Demokratikus Szövetsége (MNDSz)	Democratic Association of Hungarian Women
magzatelhajtás	illegal abortion
népnevelő	people's educator
traktorlány	female tractor driver (literally, 'tractor-girl')

Note: The plural in Hungarian is denoted by a – k suffix; for nouns that do not end in a vowel, a fill vowel is also added. Thus *népnevelő – népnevelők*, or *jampec – jampecek*.

[566] The ÁVO was renamed the ÁVH in 1948.
[567] The MKP was renamed the MDP after its absorption of the Social Democratic party in 1948.

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